INTER-CULTURATION IN THE BIBLE

Edited by
Augustine Mulloor

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Editorial

In the world nothing can be characterzed as "acultural". Every culture is the result of intercultural interactions and movements. Intercultural relationships produce both positive - assimilation, adaptation and identification, and nagative - affirmation of identity and the resultant rejection and distancing elements. In any interaction both negative and positive elements are expected. The openness brings the attitude of respect and appreciation for what one and others have and promotes mutual growth through the emergence of a "new" culture. So any approach that is exclusively either katachronic or anachronic cannot mediate communion but can only lead to fanatical attitudes and the consequent conflicts and divisions. A society that goes through the process of deterritorilization as ours today requires a beautiful blending of both the synchronic and diachronic approaches. That is the ideal movement of interculturation. And the Bible is a perfect example.

Jeevadhara in this issue explores this process of interculturation within the biblical tradition. The studies prepared by experts trace the movement of interculturation starting from the formative period of Israel, down through monarchic and prophetic periods, to the context, teaching and mission of Jesus, with models of interculturation in the early christian period.

These explorations confirm and clarify that the biblical culture is the result of interculturation and that the Bible promotes the same. Jesus the supreme and perfect paradigm or criterion of christian existence was a transcultural person and the promoter of interculturation. It is our duty today to facilitate this process in every field and in all circumstances so that an authentic global culture beyond the contradictions implied in the globalization principle and praxis of our times may emerge, so that authentic dialogical relationships may be made possible against the superficial and uncommitted relationships and communications resulting from media explosion, so that life may be

respected as the central value of culture against contradictory attitudes emerging from biotechnological developments making the possibilities of increasing life and decreasing respect for life so that authentic religiosity without hypocricy and fanaticism may be openned up against the commercialized and politicized exploitative use of religion.

If so, interculturation is not an either or, but a must, because the life we have now is the result of interculturation which has been happening constantly from the moment of our coming to existence until now and not the result of a leap in the dark. So christians are essentially interculturers, they must ever remain so.

Jyotir Bhavan   Augustine Mulloor
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Inter-culturation in the Formative Period of Israel

Thomas Vadackumkara

Formation of Israel was not something that happened in a walled up "city" through divine interventions coming from the blue skies. It was the result of divine interventions in an open society where various cultures interacted with one another. The study identifies this give and take process which happened in the formative period.

The Biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges deal with the emergence of Israel as a geographical and political entity with a unique religious identity in the Ancient Near Eastern scenario. As a cultural and ethnic group, Israel emerged from and was greatly influenced by the fabulous cultures that surrounded it. Israel, in turn, had also much to offer to her neighbours especially in terms of new religious ideas as well as architectural and juridical innovations. The reciprocal giving, receiving, adapting, assimilating and reinterpreting were part of a multifaceted cultural encounter in the initial stages of Israel's existence. The process of "giving", like the process of "receiving", was subtle and complex. The boarders of adaptations and assimilations often went unmarked. The colours were so finely blended that the constituent colours at the micro level were no more decipherable to the subsequent generations.

The process was made more complex because the emerging Israelite culture was closely related to the indigenous Canaanite culture. In this case, the adaptations and assimilations took place in a natural way without

any deliberate human intent and pre-ordained criteria. The inter-culturation in the Bible therefore, sprang up from an intimate relationship, as an outgrowth of transformation that took place in history, especially as Israel came into contact with Yahweh. What Lucien Legrand has said in his insightful book, *The Bible on Culture,* is very true about the cultural interactions in the Bible: "Now, in most cases and at the deepest level, cultural influence will be more imbibed than deliberately induced. Cultural forms are rarely produced artificially. They more commonly emerge from soil, from society, and from history and come to existence without deliberate human intent."[1] Inter-culturation in the Bible too is a process that went beyond the margins of just "giving" and "receiving". It is a process of mutual transformation that took place as the "Israelites" encountered their own and their neighbouring cultural realities in the light of their faith in Yahweh.

This article aims to demonstrate that in the process of her birth and growth, Israel remained connected to her Semitic relatives, but she received a distinct identity as she came into contact with Yahweh. Her new identity was rooted in her covenantal relationship with Yahweh. I attempt here to analyse the three stages of Israel's emergence as a nation: at the stage of coming, into being of Israel as a geographical and cultural entity; at the stage of Israel's confession of faith in a sovereign God "Yahweh"; and at the stage of Israel regulating its life with a covenant with Yahweh and by observing the laws given by Yahweh. In all these three levels we shall see that there is inter-culturation or mutual interaction and mutual transformation taking place.

1. The Emergence of Israel as a Geographical and Cultural Entity

"Your origin and birth were in the land of Canaanites, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite" (Ezek 16:5).

The cultural interactions are noticeable at the stage of Israel's deliverance from Egypt as well as at the stage of Israel establishing herself as a nation in Canaan. There are many ways in which the neighbouring cultures influenced the emerging Israel in Egypt and Canaan. Some of the factors can be inferred from the biblical data itself. These data apparently project Israel as an entity totally separate from

1.   L. Legrand, *The Bible on Culture* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001) XV.

the existing kingdoms and cultures. But these have to be understood keeping in mind the proclaimed opposition of the biblical authors to the oppressive regimes and their culture of domination. They never concealed their antipathy to the primitive cultic and religious practices of the Canaanites. As a result, we do not have much convincing evidence of the inter-cultural adaptations in the biblical text. So we will have to look for corroborating archaeological and literary data from the Ancient Near East that is available today in order to make a more mature judgement.[2]

1.1. *The Birth Story of Moses*

The fascinating story about the birth of Moses in Exod 2:1-10 has a literary parallel in an Akkadian legend. According to the legend, Sargon of Agade, the Semitic empire builder, was conceived by a high priestess and was given birth in secret. She placed him in a basket of rushes and cast him into the river. Akki, who was drawing water from the river, saw the child, took him home, and brought him up as his son. The child later became a mighty conqueror and the founder of the dynasty of Akkad *(ca.* 2360-2180 BCE).[3] The legends about the birth of Moses and Sargon have striking similarities. They give the description of an extraordinary birth story to both the great leaders. Their birth took place in secret to someone associated to the priestly class.[4] They were placed in a basket of bulrushes and cast in the river and someone found the children, rescued them and brought them up as adopted sons. The story has also differences when we consider the details. While Moses' sister stood at a distance watching the child, there was no one assigned to that task in the Akkadian story. The child was found by a princess in the Moses story while Sargon was found by "a drawer of water". There is no description of oppression and persecution of his people in the case of Sargon as in the case of Moses. The peculiar situation of oppression gives a new significance to the biblical story. This child is "drawn out" of the water so that he will become an instrument in the hands of Yahweh

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2   In recent years, there have been many archaeological excavations in the biblical lands and they have brought to light some precious archaeological remains including the parts of many ancient Near Eastern texts. Though such finds are not many, they have influenced greatly the study of the Bible.

3   Cf. J.B. Pritchard (Ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (ANET)*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) 119.

4   Considering the fact that the tribe of Levi, to which the mother of Moses belonged, later on became the priestly tribe in Israel.

"to draw" His people out of the deep dungeon of slavery. In this instance, the biblical authors probably made use of a story which was familiar to the people. However, they reinterpreted the story to suit their context and to show the plans of God being materialised through it.

1.2. The Name "Moses"

The name "Moses" seems to have its root in Egyptian. The root of this name in Egyptian is *mes* or *mesu* which mean "one born" or "a child". There were proper names in Egypt with the ending *mes*, for e.g. Thothmes which literally meant "one born of Thoth". Pfeiffer suggests that the name Moses may be a shortened form of a once longer Egyptian name.[5] In the Bible, the name Moses has a different connotation. It is, in fact, a homonym, (i.e., one of a group of words spelt in the same way but having different meanings) in which the name Moses, *mōšeh,* is attributed a meaning on the basis of an unrelated Hebrew word *māšâ*. The Hebrew root *māšâ* means "to draw" as we are told in Exod 3:10. This root occurs again only in 2 Sam 22:17b where David says, "He drew me out of mighty waters". In this instance, it is used with other active words with God as their subject such as *delivered (nāṣal), brought out (yāṣā)*. Here the word *māšâ* along with the other activities of God mentioned is used in reference to God's mighty acts of rescue. Thus, from the unrelated word *māšâ*, the name Moses derived a new meaning. Walter Brueggemann sees in it an instance of what may be a royal Egyptian name, transposed by the proposed etymology into Israelite praise for deliverance.[6] An Egyptian name is reinterpreted by the biblical story and given an entirely new meaning. According to the new meaning, the name Moses stands not only for the great prophet who was providentially drawn out of water to lead Israel out of slavery but also his name now indicates how God himself works out the deliverance through him. God's action on behalf of Israel consisted in challenging the existing system of oppression and calling for a radical social and political change. The name "Moses" is an indication as to how God Himself is in charge of this noble task.

1.3. The Plague Narratives

Not only about the etymology of the name of Moses, but also about

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5   C.F. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History,* (Grant Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1973) 151.

6   W. Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus", *The New Interpreters Bible*, Vol 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) 700.

the narratives regarding the deliverance of Israel from Egypt we see that the stories are formulated in the Egyptian background. Though the plagues take place at the word of Moses, the local factors are handsomely made use of in their presentation. All the plagues except the last one, in which all the first born sons of Egyptians are smote, have a natural explanation in conditions found even today in Egypt. The phenomenon of minute organism often turning the Nile red during floods, the sudden increase in the number of frogs usually during the month of September and the occasional attacks of the flies and gnats are not unknown in Egypt. This is not to diminish the supernatural aspect of the plagues. The intensification of these natural phenomena to serve the purpose of Yahweh is an affirmation of his power and his complete supremacy over the local deities, who otherwise, were considered to be controlling the natural powers. These factors have made Lawrence Boadt to say that "The 'sign' and the 'wonder' to an Israelite was found *not in plagues themselves but in the control that God exercised* over the whole series to bring about his plan."[7] The local colouring of the plague narratives teaches us another important aspect of inter-culturation in the Bible, namely, the biblical author's ability to present God's word in a cultural garb which fitted well to the context. The Word of God from the very beginning identified itself with and communicated through the culture of the people to whom it was addressed.

1.4. The Feast of Passover

Exod 12:1-28 gives us a vivid description about the institution of the first Passover feast among the Israelites. The rituals associated with the celebration included the slaughtering of a lamb by each household, sprinkling of its blood on the door posts and lintels, and eating the roasted lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs in a hurried manner. Many scholars think that the background of this feast is pre-Mosaic and is associated to a semi-nomadic feast. It might have been observed by the shepherds to secure the welfare of their flocks as the tribes set out for new pastures. Usually the event coincided with the spring season when the young of the flocks were born.[8] The meal had to be prepared and

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7   L. Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984) 167-168.

8   J.F. Craghan, "Passover", *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1999) 747. According to Craghan, the absence of priests, sanctuaries, and altars indicate the antiquity of this feast. Ingredients

eaten in haste because the shepherds were about to set on a sojourn in search of new pastures. The ritual of sprinkling the blood on the door posts served the function of propitiating the deities so that divine protection on the sojourners and their young ones to be born are assured. For the Israelites, this ritual has a new meaning in the context of the exodus. The tenth plague was a "danger par excellence" because through it the Lord exterminated the first born of the Egyptians and their livestock. For the Israelites it became an unforgettable experience of their deliverance and protection from dangers which began at the time of their sojourn out of Egypt and continued throughout their history. Thus, though the provision for the protection by the sprinkling of blood reflects an ancient rite, its adaptation by the Israelites transformed the meaning of it. The Lord is going to deliver them and bring them to a new pasture, where they are assured of his protection. John F. Craghan comments on the new meaning:

> "This ancient feast of semi-nomadic shepherds now expresses Israel's relationship with Yahweh. It is no longer the quest for temporary pasture but the final break from bondage to the security of the promise land. The element of change in this feast suited the change in Israel's destiny and provided the sense of hope in the face of all spiritual and physical oppression."[9]

1.5. The "Composition" of Israel

The emergence of Israel in the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I[10] period in Canaan is a very complex one. Though the Bible gives us a dramatic description about the exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, 40 years wandering in the desert and a one-time violent conquest of Canaan under Joshua, the historicity of these narratives has been doubted on two important grounds. First of all, archaeologists have argued that many of the cities which are said to have been conquered

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of the feast such as the lamb, the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs of the desert are part of the life of the Near Eastern pastors and these support the pastoral background of the feast.

9   J.F. Craghan, "Passover", 748.

10   The Late Bronze Age denotes the chronological period from 1550 to 1200 BCE and Iron Age 1 refers to the chronological period from 1200 to 1000 BCE. For the complete list of chronological periods see G. W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 54.

by Joshua did not exist in the Late Bronze Age. For instance, the cities like Arad (cf. Num 21:1), Ai (cf. Josh 7:2), Yarmuth and Hebron did not exist at that time when the Israelites are said to have conquered them.[11] Secondly, in the Biblical narrative too, we see that most of the cities said to have been conquered by Israelites remain free in the Judges narratives that follow (cf. Judg 1).

The archaeologists like P. Beck, M. Kochavi, Y. Yadin and Y. Aharoni, who tried to prove the emergence of Israelites just as it is narrated in the Bible in the light of the archaeological findings, did not make much headway.[12]

Archaeologists have proposed various theories to solve the mystery that surrounds the birth of Israel. The theories fall under two general categories: those who subscribe to the biblical model and those who think that at least a part of the Israelites were indigenous Canaanites.

Those who subscribe to the biblical model uphold the biblical claim that the Israelites were a group of people who came from outside and settled in Canaan. Some scholars among them, called the Albright school, think that there was a one time violent conquest under Joshua as narrated in the Bible. Some other scholars, led by Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth, believe that there was a gradual peaceful infiltration of Israelites into Canaan.

The second category of scholars propose the origin of Israelites from the native Canaanite population or from a combination of native Canaanites and outsiders.[13] The theories of Mendenhall and Gottwald that a great part of the population that composed Israel was indigenous Canaanites have support from the archaeological remains of the central highlands and from some Egyptian sources. According to the Egyptian sources, the political situation was fluid in Palestine in the Late Bronze Age period. The collapse of the Egyptian supremacy over Palestine

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11   A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible. 10,000-586 BCE* (New York: Double Day, 1992) 329-334.

12   G. W. Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 337-342. In fact, there is no historical proof anywhere other than in the Bible that a group of Israelites left Egypt and came to Canaan.

13   G. W. Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 345. See pp 340-345 for a brief overview of the theorie.

caused the rising of new groups. The Amarna Letters from fourteenth century BCE[14] indicate this fact. It is worth noting that the Egyptian records about the prisoners taken from Palestine after a campaign of Pharaoh Amanhotep II included 15000 *Shasu*[15] and 3600 *'apìru*.[16] According to Ahlström, the *'apìru* and the *Shasu* are the ancestors of many of the 'tribes' of the central hill country that we later meet in the biblical narratives about the period of the so-called Judges.[17] It is possible that some of the Israelites emerged from local unsettled late Bronze Age groups such as *'apìru* and *Shasu*. However, the confederation's nuclear group, which initiated Yahwism, remains elusive to the archaeologists. They are probably responsible for the origin of traditions regarding the slavery in Egypt, the Exodus, Mount Sinai and role of Moses. At present archaeology is not in a position to answer this question.[18] Ahlström summarises the findings of the archaeologists in this regard:

"The archaeological remains of the central highlands have yielded an intriguing picture of the country's population and history during the latter part of the thirteenth century BCE through twelfth-eleventh centuries. We are now in a better position than before to reconstruct that history. The cyclical periods of increase in and abandonment of settlements can be illustrated with what is now known about the Late Bronze and Iron I periods in the central highlands of Palestine. The twelfth-eleventh centuries BCE saw a steady increase in population resulting from a shift of indigenous people coupled with the immigration of other groups of people to the country. Even if there was among them a group coming from Egypt they would have blended quickly with others. Their

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14   Amarna Letters are about 350 cuneiform tablets discovered from a place called Tell el-Amarna, c. 300km South of Cairo.

15   The word *shasu* means 'to wander around'. It is the Egyptian term used for the nomads of Palestine, Transjordan and southern Syria.

16   *'apìru* were the settled population in Canaan. In Amarna Letters this is a group that was disturbing the Canaanite city states.

17   G. W. Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 236.

18   A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible. 10,000-586 BCE* (New York: Double Day, 1992) 355.

19   G. W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 369-370.

importance for the culture and religion of the land is a much later phenomenon inspired by the tragedies of history."[19]

As the discussion above reveals, the inter-culturation partly resulted from the fact that many of the Israelites emerged from the Canaanites. If that is true, the inter-culturation in this context was a matter of blood than mere external adaptations. The "Israelite culture" at that stage comprised, in fact, a wide variety of colours emanating from the indigenous cultures. The colours were so finely blended subsequently that we are not able to distinguish between them any more.

1.6. Domestic Architecture and Pottery

The influence of the Canaanite domestic architecture on Israelite hallmark "pillared houses" is another example on intercultural influence. It is believed that the "pillared houses", based on a courtyard divided by a row of pillars were typically Israelite. They were very common especially among the Israelites who lived in central hill country and in the northern Negev. A specific form of pillared houses known as "four-room house" was a typical Israelite dwelling in the eleventh century itself. This type of houses was built by the Israelites probably for the first time in Tel Masos and 'Izbet Sarath. Archaeological remains from both the places are available to us today. By tenth century BCE they were common among the Israelites as we see from many of the Israelite settlements of that time.[20] The archaeological findings have proved that these types of houses are also found in the Iron Age I strata in many other regions of the country among the Canaanite and Phoenician settlings. Possibly, this domestic architecture was based on the domestic architecture of southern Canaan in the Late Bronze Age. This style gradually became popular among the Israelites and became a hallmark of Israelite domestic architecture in the period of the Monarchy.

The "Collared-Rim" storage jars,[21] probably used as water containers, which was very common and has been identified by many archaeologists as a distinctive material culture of the Israelites, have their counterparts

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20   Cf. A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible,* 486.

21   This is a large vessel (ca. 1.2 m in height) and ovoid in shape; its rim is thick and folded, and its neck has a ridge or collar. Cf. A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible,* 346-347.

in similar pottery found at Megiddo and Tell Keisan, where Canaanite culture survived until the eleventh century BCE. Further, this type of pottery is not found in many places where there were Israelite settlements like northern Negev. Most probably the Israelites adopted the pottery making skills of the Canaanites. They might have changed only the exterior decorations. Amihai Mazar seems to be right in his conclusion:

"It appears that the Israelite settlers in the hill country lacked their own pottery-making tradition, and that initially they obtained the most necessary pottery vessels from their Canaanite neighbours. When they did begin producing pottery, they manufactured a limited repertoire of forms based on Canaanite proto-type, without adopting the Canaanite decoration."[22]

1.7. The Cultic Practices: Emergence of a Counter Culture

From the discussion above it is clear that some of the Israelites were in fact, indigenous Canaanites. This also explains why some of the local cultural practices and religious beliefs were so intimate to the Israelites in their emerging stages. The intimate relationship went beyond a mere artificial cultural adaptation to their very being - to their soil, society and to their history. The Israelite culture was at least in some ways a continuation of the Canaanite culture in the initial stages. But gradually we see that the Israelite culture became a counter culture to the Canaanite culture in many aspects. This is clear from the ancient Israel's cultic practices.

That the Canaanite cultic practices continued to influence the Israelite religion for sometime is clear from Israel's constant allurement towards bull worship. The coquetting of Israel with the bull worship is known from the biblical traditions concerning "the golden calf" (cf. Exod 32). The archaeological remains have substantiated this fact. A unique bull figurine was discovered in one of the "high places" called Dhahrat et-Tawileh, one of the early Israelite settlements. The figurine dated to Iron Age I, the period of Judges in the Bible. The excavations on the site under Amihai Mazar of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem have brought to light a cult site near to the place where the figurine was found. This cult site with the bull figurine in the region of an early Israelite settlement

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22   A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible,* 348.

raised immense curiosity in circles where the origin of Israelite cult is discussed.

The site is situated in the middle of a cluster of villages presumably belonging to the early Israelite settlement. According to Mazar these sites flourished as small agricultural villages during the Iron Age I period, and they belonged probably to the tribe of Manasseh.[23] The presence of the bull figurine in this early Israelite settlement raises many questions. The features of the bull show clearly that it did not belong to the Canaanite tradition. It is possible that the settlers brought the figurine with them. It is assumed also that the settlers were from Galilee, where the bull worship was prevalent. If so; does it mean that the early Israelites continued with their bull worship even after identifying themselves as "Yahwists" in the Iron Age 1 period? Secondly, regarding the function of the bull figurine it is understood that this figurine most probably was an object of worship representing a deity. But whom did it represent? Mazar identifies the deity to Ba'al (*Hadad*). If so, does it mean that the Israelites continued the worship of a pagan god at the early stages? If we take Yahweh as a candidate then would it mean that the early Israelites continued or adopted the pagan way of worshipping their God through an idol? The practices like "bull worship" as we saw in et-Tawileh prevailed among the Israelites to a very later period, most probably till the period of the reforms. Even if the deity whom the figurine represented or supported was Yahweh, one cannot deny the idol's long association to the Canaanite cult.

The Covenant and Deuteronomic laws explicitly forbade Israelites of worshipping any kind of idols. The reference to the worship of bull figurines in the Bible is always as an extreme act of perversity. Exod 32 describes how Israelites "turned away" from Yahweh by making the golden idol of a bull and by worshipping and sacrificing to it, and how the transgressors were punished by death. Biblical critique against "bull worship" and the gradual doing away with it show the Israelite culture had a distinct identity with a distinct God and would not sacrifice that identity even when faced with the lure of a deeply rooted cultic practice of the Canaanites. The Israelites would not compromise for a cultural

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23   A. Mazar, "The "Bull Site", 38-39

immersion betraying their God. The cultural interaction in the Bible never amounted to a "Canaanisation". Far from identifying with the degrading practices of the local cultures, the new religious faith purified and enriched the local cultures.

That the Israelites were deeply involved with the Canaanite cult is also seen in their being "snared away" repeatedly from Yahweh and "doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (cf. Judg 3:11-23; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1). The evil that is mentioned is falling into the trap of the Canaanite storm god Ba'al and his consorts (cf. 3:11-13).[24] In the Canaanite mythology, Ba'al is pictured as a weather god associated to storms and sea. He was responsible for the annual cycles of rain and fertility. The worship of Ba'al consisted of cultic rituals that dramatized and encouraged Ba'al's victory over infertility. The popularity of such rituals was naturally high in the agrarian setting of Canaan.[25] However, this went blatantly against the monotheistic faith of Israel which demanded uncompromising fidelity to Yahweh (cf. Deut 5:6-6). The prophetic critique against this kind of religious syncretism occurs as a *leitmotif* in the Book of Judges. The *leitmotif* is sketched in a literary pattern which was known in the Ancient Near East.

In the Bible, literary pattern of Israel's apostasy, formulated by the Deuteronomist pattern consists of the presentation of an ideal situation of a right Yahwistic leader and cult, apostasy after the leader dies, punishment by Yahweh, crying out for help, intervention of Yahweh to raise up a leader to deliver them, and the re-establishment of the right cult.[26] According to Ahlström, this literary pattern is part of an old Near Eastern literary tradition describing the past in term of periods of order and chaos (*Heil und Unheil*). We have attestations to this literary pattern in ancient Akkadian prophesies.

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24   According to a commentator, Dennis T. Olson, the use of the plural "Ba'als" in Judg 3:11 refers to the worship of numerous local cults in Canaan. Fertility cult was a part of the local worship. D.T. Olson, "The Book of the Judges", *The New Interpreter's Bible,* Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) 755

25   D.T. Olson, "The Book of the Judges", 755

26   For a detailed presentation of the pattern and its meaning, see G. W. Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine,*375-376.

The similarity in literary patterns of Israel's apostasy
with Akkadian prophecies:

Book of Joshua	The Akkadian Prophesies[27]
People worshipped Yahweh and remained taking care of their inheritance. Then Joshua died. (2:6-11)	Under a new ruler the country will rest secure and gods will make beneficial decisions (ii, I)
The Israelites did what is evil in the sight of the Lord. The people were punished by Yahweh, who let them be plundered by their neighbours (2:11,14)	Another ruler will arise. Akkad will be defeated by Elam. The booty of Akkad will be carried off. The temples of the great gods will be destroyed. There will be confusions, disturbances and famine. (ii,8)
Then the people cried out to the Lord for help. The Lord raised up Judges/leaders who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. The right cult was reestablished. (2:16f)	Another ruler will arise. The king will rule all the regions. The people will have abundance. The regular offerings for the Igigi-gods which had ceased he will re-establish. (iii.2)

The biblical authors have made use of this literary pattern for their ideological purposes. They use it as a systematic pattern for the presentation of their theological interpretation of history. They try to explain Israel's turbulent history of constant conflict with her neighbours as resulting from her abandonment of Yahweh and worshipping of other gods. Here we have another instance of cultural re-interpretation in the Bible. The biblical authors used a known literary genre with a transformed meaning to present the recurrent liberating actions of their God in the history. Though a *leitmotif* probably emerging from the time of prophets, the theology behind this inter-cultural literary pattern served the Israelites well to present the uncompromising will of their God: no temptations from their surrounding cultures shall cause them to ignore their single-minded fidelity to their God. Israelite culture

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27   The Akkadian prophecies exist today only in fragments. What is quoted here is the main ideas contained in the fragments. For the texts of these prophecies, see *ANET,* 606-607.

thus served as a counter-culture against the polytheism and cultic syncretism of the Canaanites.

2. Israel's Confession of faith in Yahweh

"I passed by you and saw you flailing about in your blood... I said to you, "Live! And grow up like a plant in the field" (Ezek 16:6-7).

As the Book of Exodus narrates, God revealed to Moses with an enigmatic name "I AM WHO I AM" and introduced himself as someone already known in the history of Israel as the God of their ancestors (cf. Exod 3:14-15). A closer study of the Bible reveals that God's revelation and the understanding of Israel of it was not in an entirely different way compared to their contemporary cultures. Israelites did not hesitate to attribute the title "Elohim" to Yahweh. The title Elohim was much more at home in the Semitic world. It occurs about two thousand times in the Hebrew Bible. El, the singular form of Elohim, was the name of the nominal head of the Canaanite pantheon. El was considered to be a "remote, high god" who interfered little with the affairs of the world. In the words of Pfeiffer, "El may be thought of as a mild old gentleman who delegated authority to his children, only reserving the right to be final arbiter in the event of disputes among them".[28] El in the Canaanite mythology, presided over the assembly of the gods who gathered in the furthermost reaches of the north. Pfeiffer has traced the root of El to the Akkadian *Il* or *Ilu*, which are that language's equivalent word for the common noun 'god'. The cuneiform sign *il* is prefixed to the signs representing the popular deities of the Akkadian Semitic world.[29] In the Bible, Yahweh is the El of the Israelites, the God of their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Israelite attribution of El/Elohim to denote their God points towards a shared experience of the Semitic concept of the divine. Canaan represents the milieu that nurtured the growth of Israelite understanding of their God as Elohim.

At the same time, Israel's understanding of God differed significantly from the local cultures. Israel's strict adherence to monotheism, though

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28   C.E. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History,* 70.

29   We read then of "the god Ishtar", "the god Ea" and "the god Baal." In this sense, *il* is the equivalent of our usage of the common noun "god". *Il* prefix may be understood as the equivalent of the Indian usage of *iswar*. It is similar to attributing *iswar/iswari* to the name of popular deities.

it might have evolved in a much later stage[30], was a total variation from the established polytheistic faith of the Ancient Near East. God's divine name was revealed to Israel as "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod 3:14) and this God stood in contrast to the natural gods of her neighbours. According to the popular belief, the fertility god used to visit the earth during the rainy season and the son god used to go through a daily circuit as he crossed the earth. According to Pfeiffer, "Israel's God has nothing in common with these gods of her neighbours, save for the fact that the sun, moon, and stars which they worship are the creation of the Lord. The heavens may declare the glory of the Lord, but His revelation concerns His works among His people."[31] Israel also detested the degrading practices associated with the Canaanite religion such as the offering of firstlings, building of *mazzebah* or sacred pillar which represented the male element in the fertility cult, and the chambers maintained for the sacred prostitution by *kedeshim* ("male prostitutes") and *kedeshoth* ("sacred harlots").[32] Yahweh would not tolerate any dehumanising practice or exploitation to be carried out in his name. Far from the degrading practices of primitive cult, what the Israelite God required from the people was to conduct themselves in justice and fairness.

In the Ancient Near East, god was understood as a god of a city or god of a holy place. It was Israelites who brought in the concept of 'a God of the People' who stood for a people's desperate struggle for freedom. He would not tolerate sin and sinful structures and we hear Him say "I have observed the misery of my people ... I have heard their cry ... I have come down to deliver them ..." (Exod 3:7-8). He was true to his word when He brought His people out of Egypt, sustained them through their period of wandering in the wilderness, and with His mighty hand brought them into the land of Canaan. This was in complete contrast to the traditional understanding of El, the head of the Canaanite pantheon, who was totally disinterested in the affairs of the world.

Thus, the influence of the local cultural conceptions on the Israelite understanding of God and the formulation of her religious faith are evident. Israel and her neighbours understood Yahweh as the El or god

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30   C.E. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History,* 214.

31   C.E. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History,* 215.

32   C.E. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History,* 71.

of Israelites. But the transformation which the local beliefs and traditions undergo with the emergence of the new faith is also equally significant. Israel's God is a God who is involved in the history of the people. His actions are in and through history. He is a liberator God who listens to the cries of his people and comes to their aid.

3. The Covenant and the Legal Code

"I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. ... I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you... and you became mine" (Ezek 16:8).

On the Mount Sinai, Moses received the Tablets of the Covenant, which served to regulate Israel's religious and social life in many ways. The complex polytheism of Egypt and the primitive fertility cult of Canaan gradually gave way to strict monotheism. In Egypt the Israelites had seen the worship of gods in the tangible forms of birds, beasts and humans. Contrary to this phenomenon, the Israelites should now not only refuse to bow down to any images of pagan deities, but also should not make any images of Yahweh himself. Being the covenantal people meant observing the laws given by Yahweh. In this vital process of Israel's faith formation too, the vestiges of the Near Eastern cultural influences are visible.

3.1. The Covenant

The ceremony by which the union of Israel and Yahweh was accomplished (Exod.24:3-8) consisted of a covenant ritual. Professor George Mendenhall of the University of Michigan has shown that the form of the Sinai Covenant has parallels in treaties made between kings and their vassals in the ancient Near East, particularly among the Hittites. The form of the Covenant more particularly resembles a suzerainty treaty between a suzerain and the subordinates. The similarity is noticeable in the identification of the suzerain in the introduction (cf. Exod 20:2a), in the narration of the historical background (cf. Exod 20:2b), and in the covenantal stipulations (cf. Exod 20:3; 34:12-13). Other common elements are a list of witnesses (Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31,26) and list of blessings and curses (Lev 26; Deut 27:11-28:14). There are also historical introductions to the OT legal codes like other Oriental treaties, (cf. Ex 20:1; Deut 5:4-5). Some of the similarities are presented in the table below.

The similarities between Hittite Treaties with the Biblical Covenant:

	Hittite Treaties[33]	Biblical Covenant
Preamble	"The words of the Sun Mursulis, the great king, king of the Hatti land ..." (1)	"Then God spoke all these words:..." (Exod 20:1) "Then Yahweh said to Moses: ..." (20:22)
Historical Introduction	"Aziaras was the grandfather of you, Duppi-Tessub. He rebelled against my father, but submitted again to my father ..."(2)	"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ..." (Exod 20:2)"
Future Stipulations	"... So, honour the oath (of loyalty) to the king and the king's *kin* ... And just as I shall be loyal toward you, even so I shall be loyal toward your son..."(8f)	"...you shall have no gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol,..." (Exod 20:3f)
A List of Witnesses	'The Son-god of Heaven, the Sun-goddess of Arinna *(the list continues with a long list of names of deities)* ... let these be witnesses to this treaty and to the oath." (18)	"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today...." (Deut 30:19)
Blessings and Curses	"... should Duppi-Tessub not honour these words of the treaty and the oath, may these gods of the oath destroy Duppi-Tessub..." (20) "But if Duppi-Tessub honors these words ... may these gods of the oath protect him..." (21)	"...Cursed be any one who makes an idol or casts an image ..." (Deut 27:11-26) "If you will only obey the Lord your God diligently observing all his commandments,... the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations.."(Deut 28:1-14).

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33 '*ANET,* 203-204. The treaty mentioned here is one between Mursulis and Duppi-Tessub of Amurru.

Another characteristic peculiar to the Israelite legal system was its similarity to the treaty agreement. While in most of the countries, the law was the will of the sovereign imposed on the people, in Israel the law took the form of a mutually accepted covenant. The ancient legal codes of Israel have similarity with the clauses of treaties. The clauses were written on stone tablets (cf. Exod 24:12; 31:18) and they were presented to the people and mutually agreed upon at Sinai and Shechem (Exod 20:1; 24:3; Josh 24:25-26). This treaty was periodically renewed and accepted by the people as a covenant as we see during the reign of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:2-3).

The Oriental treaties were inscribed on tablets, or engraved on a stele and placed in a sanctuary in the presence of gods. Similarly, the tablets containing the Decalogue were placed in a sacred tent in the Ark of the Covenant (Exod 25:16; Josh 24:26; 2 Kgs 22:8). Like the Oriental treaties, the OT Law also was to be publicly read periodically as Moses commanded them to read the laws publicly in every seventh year (Deut 31:10-13).

3.2. The Laws

The Biblical Laws comprise the following: the Decalogue or the "Ten Words" of Yahweh (Exod 20:2-17); the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22-23:33) which includes the directions regarding the slaves, cattle, seeds, vineyards and houses; the Deuteronomic Code (Deut 12-26) consisting of many short collections of laws regarding many subjects of daily life of the Israelites; the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26) meant to remind the people of the holiness of Yahweh and His people; and the Priestly Code (Lev 1-16) consisting of laws about sacrifice (Lev 1-7), the ritual for the installation of priests (Lev 8-10) and the laws of purity (Lev 11-16).[34]

Ancient Near East had developed an elaborate system of jurisprudence. The archaeological discoveries have brought to light partial and some times well preserved cuneiform documents of the following legal codes: Sumerian laws of Ur-Nammu (twenty first century BCE); Eshnunnu and Lipit-Istar (nineteenth century BCE); Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (eighteenth century BCE); Hittite Laws (fifteenth century BCE); and Middle Assyrian Laws (fifteenth century BCE).

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34   Cf. R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) 143-144

Scholars have pointed out similarities between the casuistic laws[35] of Exod 21:28-32. Laws of Eshnunnu (pars 53-55) and the Laws of Hammurabi (pars 250-252).

Similarities between the casuistic laws of the Bible and the cuneiform traditions: (The phrases in bold indicate similar hypothetical cases and the phrases underlined indicate the similarity in the penalties.)

Exodus 21:28-29.32	Laws of Eshnunnu (pars. 53-55)[36]	Laws of Hammurabi (pars. 250-252)[37]
28: **When an ox gores a man or a woman to death,** the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but <u>the owner of the ox shall not be liable.</u> 29: **If the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past,** and its owner has been warned but has not restrained it, and it kills a man or a woman, <u>the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death.</u> 32: **If the ox gores a male or female slave,** <u>the owner shall pay to the slave-owner thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.</u>	53: If an ox gores (other) ox and caused (its) death, both ox owners shall divide (among themselves) the price of the live ox and also the meat of the dead ox. 54: **If an ox is known to gore habitually and the authorities have brought the fact to the knowledge of its owner,** but he does not have his ox *dehorned,* it gores a man causes (his) death, <u>then the owner of the ox shall pay two-thirds of a mina of silver.</u> 55: **If it gores a slave and causes (his) death,** <u>he shall pay 15 shekels of silver.</u>	250: **If an ox when it was walking along the street: gored a seignior to death,** <u>that case is not subject to claim.</u> 251: **If a seignior's ox was a gorer and its city council made it known to him that it was a gorer,** but he did not pad its horns (or) tie up his ox, and the ox gored to death a member of the aristocracy, <u>he shall give one half mina of silver.</u> 252: **If it was a seignior's slave,** <u>he shall give one third mina of silver.</u>

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35   Casuistic laws attempt to resolve particular cases by the application of general rules. It refers to one of the standard ways of ancient legal formulation beginning with the stereotypic expressions "when individuals quarrel.. .", "when a slave owner strikes ...", or "if a man buys a slave ..." and so on.

36   *ANET,* 163,   37. *AMET,* 176.

The harm done to people and animals from unruly oxen was probably a usual thing among the ancient pastoral and agrarian population. So, it is natural that there were laws to deal with such an eventuality in all these cultures. As we observe above, there are striking similarities between the Biblical laws and other cuneiform traditions regarding the formulation of these laws. All the three laws mentioned above deal with an ox goring another person or an ox to death, an additional penalty for the owner of an ox that has the precedence of goring, and a situation in which a slave is attacked.

The Israelite Law was also radically different from the Oriental laws in many respects. Following are some of the differences:

a) Though almost all the Ancient Near Eastern countries had their own concern and regard for the rule of law, in many countries like Egypt and Babylonia, it was the will of the emperor which was considered as law. In Egypt, Pharaoh, son of Ra, was considered a God upon earth and he was supposed to be the "living law". He laid down the law in his country. Some of the countries had their written legal codes. Babylonia had, in fact, several collections of laws but they were not binding upon the judicial activity in the courts. In dispensing justice, it was the will of the judge or the king that prevailed. Not only that, the law codes were attributed to the initiative of a king or placed under his name. All the Mesopotamian codes were promulgated by kings. In Israel, the laws were of religious nature and related to the covenant. So there was no royal promulgation. The kings had the administrative duty of organising the kingdom, appointing judges and so on but he did not enact law.[38]

b) The Oriental laws governed the relations of the people to a human suzerain. The Israelite laws, on the other hand, were governed by the people's dependence on Yahweh. Thus it was a religious law. It is true that the Oriental laws like Hittite and Lipit-Ishtar have gods as their guarantor. But only Israelite law is ascribed totally to God as its author.

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38   R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions,* 145-150. The Sumerian Law code Lipit-ishtar was promulgated by Lipit-Ishtar. Also the Assyrian code, compiled probably by a private jurist about 1100 BCE, was considered only as a reference book and not as an authoritative code. Even the two recently discovered law codes from Ras Shamra and Alalakh assign special place to the king acting as representative of public authority and the judgement is represented as his personal act, without reference to a law of the State.

c) The Israelite laws were also apodictic in nature. They were meant as instructions or teachings about the way Israel, the chosen people of Yahweh, should conduct themselves. So, the laws were preceded by a recalling of the actions of Yahweh in the history of Israel (cf. Exod 23:9; Lev 19:36; Deut 5:15; 24:18) with the purpose of instructing the people. Recalling of the history would serve to remind the people that because the Lord has been so gracious and faithful to their ancestors, they are now obliged to obey His law. Their past experience should ascertain them of the fact that His law is for their good.

With regard to the casuistic laws and the nature of punishments, there are the following differences:

a) Covenant Code does not mention physical mutilation in variation with the Middle Assyrian Laws which has laws prescribing the cutting off of ears in addition to the imposition of a fine on a woman who has stolen above five minas of lead. If her husband refuses to pay the fine her nose is to be cut off too (cf. Tablet A,5)! The punishment for kissing another man's wife is chopping off of the lower lip of the offender (Tablet A,9)![39]

b) While death by stoning was a common punishment throughout the near east, the more gruesome punishment like crucifixion is unknown in the Old Testament. Death by burning is proposed only in two cases: prostitution by a priest's daughter (Lev 21:9) and the incest of a man who weds both mother and daughter (Lev 20:14). According to De Vaux, though bodily mutilation is fairly common in the Code of Hammurabi and the Assyrian Laws, it is found in the Israelite law only in the special case of Deut 25:11-12, which is an instance of symbolic retaliation.[40]

c) Though the Mosaic Law shares the prejudice against women as in most of the ancient law codes, it is heartening to read the concern Yahweh has for the orphaned daughters of Zelophehad in Num 27:1-11. Zelophehad, a just person who had actually no part in the Korah rebellion, died without leaving a male progeny. In the ancient tribal law codes, the women were not entitled for inheritance right. But the daughters of Zelophehad argued that since their father was a just man, his clan should have the right to continue to exist through them. Yahweh not only

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39   *ANET,* 180-181

40   R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions,* 159.

favourably considered their plea, but also made it a common norm in Israel that if a man died without a son, his property should pass on to his daughters (cf. Num 27:6-8).[41]

The cuneiform law codes were spread in a wide geographical area across the spectrum of Ancient Near East. It is doubtful whether Israelites had direct access to them. There have been no archaeological proofs for the existence of such law codes in Canaan. Nor is there any possibility that Israelites might have send study groups to other countries to study their laws before formulating their own law code. However, we should remember that Palestine was a middle ground between Mesopotamia and Egypt from economic and political point of view. The unique position of Palestine almost like a "land bridge" between the two ancient civilizations made it possible for Palestine to have access to most of the accomplishments of ancient civilizations. The cultural influences from the north and the south had a meeting point here through many peoples who travelled through it. It made Palestine, in fact, "a melting pot of cultural achievements" in the words of Y. Aharoni[42]. So, some indirect influence of the legal systems of the Mesopotamia on the Israelite law codes cannot be ruled out. De Vaux thinks that the close connections and occasional identity of expression in the Israelite and other Near Eastern law codes has to be explained not by direct borrowing but by the influence of a single widespread customary law.[43] According to Legrand, the concern for justice in the Ancient Near East is present in the Biblical Law Codes too:

> "Rather than *in-* or *en-*culturation, we have a double process of emergence and ongoing *osmosis* that goes deeper than any "inculturation", or "incarnation" or "contextualization", which all suppose an aposteriori effort. It was rather a matter of shared life and common regard for justice. While giving it the specific stamp of its faith vision, Israel took part in the noble quest for justice, which characterised the culture of western Asia."[44]

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41   Against the dark shadow of gender prejudice of the ancient Near Eastern cultures, we see that in some of the biblical stories, as the feminist interpreters of our day have brought to our notice, the women characters have, in fact, played a significant role. Cf. Exod 15:20-21; ib. 2:1-10; ib. 15:20-21.

42   Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (PA., 1979) 6.

43   R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 146.

44   L. Legrand, *The Bible on Culture*, 11.

Concluding Remarks

Israel forged its identity through an on going process of cultural encounter with her neighbouring cultures. We saw this encounter taking place at the various levels of Israel's coming into being. Many aspects of the Israelite cult, domestic architecture, law and so on had their roots in Canaan or in their neighbouring cultures. The cultural encounter, in fact, began from within their very being and it was not forced upon them. It was not a disguised invasion or a cultural transplantation. As they encountered the word of Yahweh and experienced His loving and benevolent actions on behalf of them, transformations began to take place. The word was "en-fleshed" in idioms understandable to them (e.g. the legend about the birth of Moses, the homonym involved in the name "Moses", the use of natural phenomena in Egypt in the plague narratives etc.). In the light of the word, they were able to reinterpret the events and facts of their history and life. The reinterpretation gave them a new identity and a new culture. The new culture that developed was a revolt against oppressive regimes and their culture of domination. It also opposed every kind of dehumanising and exploitative practices in religion and cult. This is a model for evangelization relevant for all times. Evangelization does not mean cultural exportation or cultural transplantation. In fact, every culture has to emerge from the soil, from the society, and from the history of the people. Evangelization means letting the word of God encounter the culture, entering the culture in a garb recognizable to that culture, refining and strengthening the life promoting elements in that culture, and challenging the elements of that culture which denies life of freedom, justice and self respect. The cultures on the other hand gains much when their value systems are put to test in the light of the faith and open themselves to new values. Evangelization is not possible without cultural interaction at deeper levels. The Second Vatican Council affirmed this fact when it said that the faith needs to be explained "in terms of the philosophy and wisdom of the people, and how their customs, concept of life and social structures can be reconciled with the standard proposed by divine revelation" (*Ad Gentes* 22).

Israel's understanding of Yahweh was in some ways rooted in the local religious beliefs but gradually she transformed the indigenous belief system with her uncompromising monotheistic faith and contempt for cultic syncretism. While Israel felt at home in naming her God "Elohim", the name of the head of Canaanite pantheon, she was uncompromising

in her diatribes against polytheism and idolatry. The great monotheistic faiths that emerged from Palestine owe this characteristic to the Israelites. Israel not only gave her God a name which was familiar in the local milieu, but also transformed the concept of God in the Ancient Near East by proposing a God of history, who took delight in freedom and just conduct of His people.

The Israelites succeeded in giving their God a name that encompassed the traditional understanding as well as responded to the burning issue of their day by answering the quest of the people for freedom, justices and identity. This is what we too are called to do today, to give our God a name that is understandable to the people to whom he is presented and to make that God relevant to the issues of the day. The crisis of faith that we face in the post-modern time is partly because we have failed to present a God who can answer the needs and fulfil the aspirations of the post modern people. Our inability to do so will only make our faith increasingly irrelevant and our God and faith increasingly strange to our generation. A split between God and culture is something which the world cannot afford. Pope Paul VI understood this challenge when he said:

"The rift between gospel and culture is undoubtedly an unhappy circumstance of our times just as it has been in other eras. Accordingly, we must devote all our resources and all our efforts to the sedulous evangelization of human culture, or rather of the various human cultures. They must be regenerated through contact with the gospel." *(Evangeli Nuntiandi,* 20)

Finally, our study of the cultural interactions in the Bible also shows that the cultural influences were not the results of *aposteriori* efforts. The influences and the transformations took place as the Word encountered the cultures. The formulation of the beliefs, customs, patterns of behaviour, techniques etc. took place in a simultaneous process as the "Israelites" encountered the word of Yahweh. Of course, the traditions as we have them in the Bible today might have taken centuries to emerge. The power of the Word consisted in its ability to engage the problems faced by the people of that time and its ability to give meaning to their lives. The new culture, which we call "biblical culture" or "Israelite culture", sprang up as a natural outgrowth from this multifaceted engagement.

As our study of the treaties the law codes have revealed, the Israelite covenant and laws are also similar to their neighbours. But the Israelite understanding and formulations have remarkable differences too. The author and guarantor of the Israelite Law is not an earthly sovereign but an all powerful God. His tool of enforcing the law is not the brute military force of the king but His own benevolent actions in the history which "obligated" uncompromising obedience from His people. The prophet would understand it as a "law written in the heart" (cf. Jer 31:33) and not "on the stones". The obedience is not enforced but extracted out of one's heart's desire to reciprocate the love inspired by "the new spirit" that the Lord has put in every one (Ezek 36:26). Here fear gives way to love. And the law is transformed by love.

The process of transformation of human hearts and cultures which began in the Old Testament reached its culmination in Jesus Christ, God's own incarnated son. He transformed the human hearts by imprinting the image of God's love in it. He in turn also transformed his religion and God into a language that would touch every culture in its deepest being when he revealed God as love and paraphrased his mission in an emotional prayer to this God: "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn 17:26). This is the task of what evangelization is about: to proclaim the Word of God transformed by the indigenous cultures and to permeate every culture by the transforming power of the Word of Love.

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Cultural Integration
of Israel in the Monarchic Period

Pascal Koroth

The establishment of Israel into a kingdom was an important milestone in her history. A lot of cultural interactions took place in that context. The discernment of those intercultural movements once again helps us see how no monolithic biblical culture exists. It is always pluri-dimensional.

The cultural and religious encounter between Israel and its neighbouring nations was a complex and very long conflict, a lengthy process of assimilation and rejection. Israel, with its newly found identity as a nation due to the unique religious experiences, termed in the Biblical tradition as the Exodus Event, had to its credit only a nomadic background. When they gradually settled in Palestine they had to encounter nations which were well established in their own cultural identity. The basic question Israel had to face continually was this: What could be accepted from the Canaanite culture? What had to the rejected as inconsistent with the faith of Israel? The entire history of Israel is characterized by options they made and the risks they took in meeting this challenge with its ups and downs. Biblical history shows that Israel did not isolate itself from other nations and build up their own ghetto religion with archaic practices alone. It learned to live with other nations and get involved in the mainstream of the history of all peoples.[1] In fact

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1   Cf. Joseph Pathrapankal, "Church and Culture", in *Dimensions of the Word* (Bangalore: TPI 2000) p 238-239. For explanations on the Deuteronomist history of the Old Testament and its sense of uniqueness and consequently

there was an inter-culturation between Israel and other nations for which the basic ideal is of 'give and take'. God's revelatory and redemptive intervention in the life of Israel served as the inspiring and discerning force in this process of give and take. The Old Testament contains not only the religious experience of Israel but also an astounding example of the influence of other people on it, as well as its influence on others. The decisive stage of this cultural integration of Israel is the Monarchic period. During this period the process of cultural integration made considerable progress when secular realities and institutions were adapted to the religious systems of Israel's life and were given new theological meaning and religious significance.[2] With the religious certainty that Israel is the covenant community of Yahweh, it established itself among the nations by means of a hard process of inter-culturation. This inter-culturation process was dynamic and multifaceted.

In order to make a fruitful discussion about this cultural integration during the monarchic period, it is necessary to identify the important areas as well as elements of cultural interpenetration. By culture we mean the 'sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another'.[3] It is a product of human action. Culture basically is a process of ongoing refinement. No culture, however ancient and authentic, is perfect.[4] One may identify in the "ways of living" the following specific elements: political and administrative set-up, religious beliefs, cultic ceremonies, legal codes, architectural/artistic elements (music, art), festivals and amusements.

exclusivism, cf. Anthony R. CERESKO, "The Encounter of Cultures and the Growth of Biblical Tradition", *Bible Bhashyam* XXVI (2000), p. 272. For a concise exposition of the important nations Israel encountered, cf. Abraham Pezhumkattil, "People of Israel and the Nations", *Bible Bhashyam* XIX (1993) p. 79-102.

2   Cf. Joseph PathrapankaL, "Church and Culture" p. 239.

3   Cf. K J. Gabriel, " The Cultic and Prophetic Cultures in the Bible", *Bible Bhashyam* XXVI (2000) p. 231. Cf. also S.M. Michael, "Bible and Culture" *Bible Bhashyam* XXVI (2000) p. 216-229 and Chacko Aerath, "Dialetical Relationship between Culture and Ethics", *Indian Theological Studies* 35 (1998) p. 166-172.

4   Cf. Joseph Pathrapankal, "Church and Culture" p. 236. On emergence of Bible in multicultural environment, cf. S.M. Michael, "Christianity and Cultures", *Indian Theological Studies* 40 (2003) p.36-45.

We intend to develop these specific elements though not in an exhaustive way. Greater emphasis will be on the process of assimilation by Israel than its contribution to the other nations. The Biblical sources for developing this essay are the Historical Books, dealing with the monarchic period, those Prophetical Books which have the monarchic setting, the Psalms and those Wisdom Books which definitely originated in the monarchic background.

Political and Administrative Set-up

In its earlier history, Israel was a theocracy, God himself being the sovereign ruler. Practically, tribal leaders who had been charismatic figures designated by God through some extraordinary means governed the people. The adoption of monarchy in Israel itself is a sign of cultural adaptation. When Samuel, the last of the Judges (I Sam 7: 16-17) became old he appointed his two sons as judges at Beersheba, but they accepted gifts and bent justice to their own ends (I Sam 8:1-3). It is then that the Israelites pleaded Samuel to give them a king. In asking for a king the people expressed their wish to be like other nations. "Appoint for us a king to govern us, like other nations" (I Sam 8:50). "We are determined to have a king over us so that we also may be like other nations and that our king may govern us and go out before us" (I Sam 8:19-20). Introduction of monarchy in Israel was in view of 'becoming like other nations'. The nations which surrounded Israel were well established monarchies. It was the king who executed justice in Israel and also in the nations. Among the texts lately discovered at Ras Shamra and Alalakh there are, in fact, judgements given by the king and contracts guaranteed by his seal. On a wider scale, the preamble of Mesopotamian codes, the poems of Ras Shamra as well as in Aramaean and Phoenician inscriptions demand as the first quality of a king the virtue of justice.[5] In Israel too the kingship was inseparably linked to the administration of justice. (Ps 72:1-2; Ps 16:12; 25:5; 29:14; cf. Isa 9:6). The king was called the judge of Israel (Mic 4:14).

As for the divine choice of the king is concerned it was a universal belief in the Ancient Near East. Even when there was dynastic succession ideal the divine choice of the king is presumed. Women were excluded

5   Cf. Roland De VAUX, *Ancient Israel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1980) p. 151. For a critical look at the history of Kings, cf J.G. I McConville, " Narrative and Meaning in the Book of Kings", *Biblica* 70 (1989) p. 31-49.

The chief god in the Canaanite pantheon was *El*. In the Old Testament, *El* is a common term for 'god' in the Semitic languages. *El* is used in the Old Testament as a synonym for 'Yahweh'.[14] Various combinations of *El* are found in the Old Testament as manifestation of Yahweh: They are *El-shaddai, El-Bethel, El-Olam, El-Elyon, El-Roi, El-Elohei* Israel. Later, several pre-Yahwistic sanctuaries belonging to the cult of *El,* together with a number of Canaanite sanctuaries were dedicated to Yahweh. The sanctuary of Beersheeba, the ancient sanctuary of Mizpha, the sanctuary at Mt. Tabor are some important ones. These shrines were dedicated to Yahweh and laid out after the model of Canaanite cultic sites.[15]

In Canaanite religion, Baal was in some ways more prominent. As a Semitic common noun Baal meant "owner" or "Lord". In the early stages of the Israelite history, the presence of Baal names did not necessarily mean apostasy or even syncretism. Even in families known for Yahwistic faith, such names are found: Jerubbaal (Judg 6:32), Ishbaal, son of king Saul (I Chr 8:33). This could mean that the name Baal, 'lord', was taken as an epithet of Yahweh. But orthodox Israelite faith rejected categorically every kind of cult of Baal (I Kings 18). But one cannot deny the cultural ties between Yahwism in Israel and the beliefs of the neighbouring nations.[16]

The most important religious expression of the relationship of Yahweh and Israel is the Covenant. It is part of the Exodus event that God entered into a Covenant relationship with Israel. The earliest Pentateuchal tradition, J, which originated during Solomonic times, has recorded it (Ex 24:1-2; 9-12). Another Pentateuchal tradition of the monarchic period,

14   Cf. Geevarghese Mathew, " The Influence of Canaanite Religious Culture on Israel's Expression of Its Faith in "Yahweh", *Bible Bhashyam* XXVI (2000) p. 246. For brief presentation of the divine name and its theological implications, cf Pascal Koroth, "Indian and Israelite Understanding of God", *Indian Interpretation of Bible,* Ed. Augustine Thottakara (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications 2000) p. 94-110.

15   Cf. Geevarghese Mathew, "The Influence of Canaanite Religious Culture on Israel's Expression of Its Faith in Yahweh" p. 247. Cf. also J. L'Hour, "The People of the Covenant Encounters the Nations: Israel and Canaan", *Service and Salvation,* Ed. Joseph Pathrapankal (Bangalore: TPI 1973) p. 74-75.

16   Cf. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas,* Vol. I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Pres,s 1978) p. 184.

E, has recorded it with different rituals (Ex 24: 3-8). Ex 34:10-28 reiterates the Covenant. The Duetronomic recalling of the Covenant can be seen in Deut 29:9-15. This covenant will be frequently recalled by the prophets. When they speak about a new covenant (Isa 61:8; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 16:60; 17:15; 37:26). During the monarchic period this covenant theme got a new dimension. Israelites understood the promise of Yahweh to David (2 Sam 7:13-16) in terms of a covenant (Ps 89.1-4; 35-39). The covenant itself was based on models developed into analogous forms by the contemporary peoples of Canaan and Asia Minor.[17] The recent studies on the Biblical theme of Covenant have yielded much results.[18]

One important element which originated and continued all through the monarchic period was prophecy. Prophecy survived the Exile and continued till the Persian period. Prophecy, whose function in Israel was unlike that of any other people of the times, had in Israel the same humble beginnings that it had in Phoenicia, in Canaan and in Amorite Mesopotamia and pursued to the end using similar techniques.[19] The cultural interaction of Israel and the nations is very much evident in the sapiential and legal texts. Egypt and Arabia were the routes by which Wisdom entered the mainstream of Israelite life. It was eventually assimilated into the covenant theology of Israel.[20] Bible gives a rich sapiential tradition, origins of which is often related to Solomon. (I Kings 4:29-34) But it is widely admitted that there was much interaction between the Israelite wisdom and the wisdom of the nations. It is possible that the sapiential elements of the contemporary nations were assimilated by the Israelite wisdom sources and thus became vehicles of communicating the faith of Israel.[21] At the same time there are instances in the Historical

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17   Cf. Mathew Vellanickal, "Biblical Background of Inter-religious Dialogue", p. 107.

18   Cf . The Scholarly Work of Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, (Rome: Biblical Institute 1982). Cf. also Lucien Legrand, 'The Bible and the Religions of the Nations", *Indian Theological Studies* 32 (1995) p. 197-199.

19   Cf. Bruce Vawter, "Israel's Encounter with the Nations", p. 85-86. For the provenance of Prophecy in its earlier forms from the neighbouring nations, cf. Rui de Menezes, *Voices from Beyond: Theology of the Prophetical Books* (Mumbai: St. Paul's 2003) p. 17-20

20   Cf. Mathew Vellanickal, "Biblical Background of Inter-religious Dialogue", p.107.

21   Cf. K. Luke, "Impact of Egyptian Culture" p. 264-270. The author illustrates

from succession.[6] The coronation ceremonies in Israel had many elements common to the coronation ceremonies of the neighbouring nations, regarding the setting, the investiture ceremony, the anointing, acclamations and enthronement.[7] The magnificent titulary found in Isa 9:5 has literary affinity to the Egyptian tradition.[8] A special item connected with kingship in Egypt was the royal protocol which was supposed to be written by the gods and was handed over to the king when he ascended the throne. In Israel too there was the protocol which contained the promises Yahweh made to David and which was presented to the kings of David's line on the day of their coronation. (2 Kings 11:12)[9]

The Historical books mention that David and Solomon created what we may call a large body of bureaucrats in order to run efficiently the affairs of the kingdom. Even after the division of the kingdom the bureaucracy continued to function. This is clear from 2 Kings 18:18 and Isa 22:15-25. The organization of the bureaucracy and the way in which were functioning arose under the influence of the system of government in Egypt.[10] 2 Sam 8:16-18 and I Kings 4:3 give the names of royal officials under David and Solomon. A question may be raised: How did the bureaucratic organization in Egypt become known to the rulers of Israel? Directly or indirectly via Canaan? According to K. Luke, a direct borrowing on the part of David seems most unlikely because he never went to Egypt nor did he have Egyptians in his entourage. The petty kings of Canaan had imitated the Egyptian royal set up. From the Amarna letters we know that among the court officials of the Canaanite kings there were scribes who had mastered Accadian, the international language of communication in the second millennium BCE. The set up at the Canaanite courts was simply absorbed by the Israelites in the age of David and Solomon and it lasted till the destruction of Judah in 586.[11]

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6   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel,* p. 101.

7   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel,* p. 104-107.

8   Cf. K Luke, " The Impact of Egyptian Culture in Israel", *Bible Bhashyam* XXVI (2000) p. 260.

9   Cf K, Luke, " The Impact of Egyptian Culture in Israel", p. 260-261. Cf. Gerard Von Rad, "The Royal Ritual in Judah", *The Problem of the Hexatuech and Other Essays* (New York: 1966) p. 222-231. Cf. also, Benjamin Abotehie, " How Kings were Made in Ancient Israel and Judah, From History to Tradition" *Bible Bhashyam* XXIII(1997)p. 71-89.

10   Cf K. Luke, "The Impact of Egyptian Culture in Israel", p. 262.

11   Cf K. Luke, "The Impact of Egyptian Culture in Israel", p. 263-264.

The influence of the neighbouring nations upon Israel as a monarchy extended to a wide range of areas such as the royal household, the administrative set up, the military institution etc. One point may be emphasized as specific to the monarchic period. Before the establishment of monarchy the equality of the people of Israel was a recognized fact. But once monarchy was introduced things changed. As the Deutronomist editor put it in I Sam 8:10-18, the basic equality of Israelites gradually disappeared as a result of the introduction and establishment of monarchy. Forced labour was introduced among the people. "King Solomon conscripted forced labour out of all Israel; the levy numbered thirty thousand men" (I Kings 5:13). But however, Solomon made of the Israelites no slaves (I Kings 9:22). Forced labour was universal in the Ancient Near East: in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria and Palestine. I Kings 15:22 suggests that there was forced labour under king Asa. Prophet Jeremiah denounced Jehoiakim for building his palace making men to work without paying their wages. (Jer 22:13).[12] David imposed it on the Ammonites (2 Sam 12:31). 2 Sam 20:24 suggests that towards the end of David's reign he set a minister to look after the forced labour. 2 Kings 9:15-25 gives the details of Solomon's conscriptions.

Religious Beliefs

Even when it is categorically affirmed that the basis of the Israelite religion is the revelatory and redemptive intervention of God in the life of the people of Israel by reason of gratuitous divine election, the articulation of their faith and the establishment of the structures of their religious and civic life were greatly influenced by the neighbouring nations. The development of Yahwism in Israel itself is a disputed topic. "The Medianite provenance of the cult of Yahweh is more than hinted by the major Pentateuchal tradition"[13] which originated during the monarchic period. The traditional view is that Yahwism is associated strictly with the revelation at Mount Sinai and it is the Israelites of exodus who brought Yahwism to the land of Canaan. The interaction between the religion of Israel and the religion of the Canaanites was quite natural.

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12   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 141-142.

13   Cf. Mathew VellanickaL, "Biblical Background of Inter-religious Dialogue", *Bible Bhashyam* XIII (1987) p. 107-108. Cf. also Bruce Vawter, "Israel's Encounter with the Nations", *Service and Salvation*, Ed. Joseph 'Pathrapankal (Bangalore: TPI 1973) p. 141-142.

daughter of the Aramaen king of Geshur (2 Sam 3:3). Solomon became the son-in-law of the Egyptian Pharaoh (I Kings 3:1). He took wives from among the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Sidonians and the Hittites (I Kings 11:1; 14:21) in order to strengthen the bonds with them. The marriage of Ahab with Jezebel, daughter of king of Tyre (I Kings 16:31) was arranged by his father king Omri in order to strengthen his alliance with the Phoenicians. This openness of Israelite kings to the neighbours led to the introduction of elements which vitiated Israel's faith in Yahweh. (I Kings 11:4-9). Because of this deviation from faith due to the marital relationship with the gentiles, later sources of the Old Testament will reject such relationships as forbidden (I Kings 11:2; Deut 7:3-4; 17:17).

Legislative Aspect

Another area of inter-culturation between Israel and the nations during the monarchic period is of legislation. The civil legislation of the Old Testament belongs to the same ancient world; though it has an originality of its own. The close connection and even the occasional identity of expression which we find between Israelite law and the code of Hammurabi, or the Assyrian laws or the Hittite laws is to be explained by the influence of a single widespread customary law. The legal codes of the Old Testament are collections of particular rules like the Eastern codes, which are unified. The laws of the nations are more heterogeneous; ethical, religious or ritual prescriptions are found side by side with rules of civil and criminal law. There are two types of laws: 1) casuistic law, in which the conjunction 'if' or 'supposing that' introduces a typical case, followed by the solution. 2) apodictic law which lays down commands or prohibitions in the grammatical form of second person future. The casuistic form is used chiefly for secular laws, the apodictic form for cultic laws.[27]

Modern critical studies on the origin of these two forms of laws in Israel admit the influence of the neighbouring nations. The theory, which holds that the casuistic laws of Israel are borrowed from the Canaanite legislation and the apodictic laws are strictly of Israelite origin, was popular for some time. But the Canaanite laws are not scientifically ascertained and so the theory has no critical standing. But the

27   For elaboration, cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 146.

Mesopotamian laws are compiled in casuistic form and its influence in Israel and *vice versa* are possible. De Vaux suggests that the Old Testament legislation is much closer to that of the Hittite documents which date from the second half of the second millennium.[28] 2 Kings 23:2-3 speaks about the re-promulgation of the law, which is the basis of the Deuteronomic reform. The process of 'give and take' is a fact in the formation of the laws of Israel. Legal interpenetration is a probable thing in the history of Israel. In the early stages of the Israelite history this process definitely took place. But with the establishment of monarchy the legal integration took place.

One important concern in this process of integration from the side of Israel was the preservation of the covenant identity. Israelite laws enjoin severe penalties for all crimes against God: idolatry, blasphemy and for crimes, which tarnish the holiness of the chosen people such as bestiality, sodomy and incest. The reason for this is the concern for the preservation of identity. But as far as other laws are concerned, leniency and humaneness are the outstanding mark. Thus the Israelite law, unlike the Eastern laws, limits capital punishment to offences against the purity of worship, against the sanctity of life and the sources of life. Bodily mutilation as a punishment of *lex talionis* is found in the Israelite law only in the special case of Deut 25:11-12 while it is fairly common in the code of Hummarabi and the Assyrian laws.[29] In short, Israel's laws which spelt out its covenant duties and formed their commentary were drawn from principles of justice and equity which Israel shared with her neighbours of the Near East, i.e., with Assyrians, Babylonians, Sumerians and Hittites. Even the so called apodictic laws, which were once thought to be unique to the Mosaic codes are now recognized to have their parallels among other people in other religions.[30]

Architectural Aspect

Another significant area of cultural interaction between Israel and the Canaanite neighbourhood was architecture. Coming from a nomadic background Israel was, as one would expect, quiet backward in this. At the same time, Israel's interaction as a nomadic people with the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures will have enriched its own

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28   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel,* p. 147.

29   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel,* p. 149, 158-159.

30   Cf. Bruce Vawter, "Israel's Encounter with the Nations", p. 85.

books which show the presence of superior wisdom in Israel, which even the gentiles admired (1 Kings 10:1-10). The religious music and poetry of Israel are also marks of a strong Canaanite influence.

Cultic Practices

Cult and culture are closely related. Both derive from the same root *colere* which means to nurture, to cultivate, to care for. The term cult is broader than the term worship as it constitutes all religious experiences including ritualistic or ceremonial observances. By 'cult' we mean all those acts by which communities or individuals give outward expression to their religious life, by which they seek and achieve communication with God. Rituals and ceremonies are integral to any culture.[22] In the life of Israel always there were cultic practices even during the time of some most severe condemnation of cult as found in Isa 1:11; 48:1; Jer 6:20; Am 4:4-5; 5:21-24; Mic 6:8 etc.). From the earliest stage of Israelite history cultic practices can be seen. Even in its primitive history sacrifices are mentioned (Gen 4:3-4). Abraham built an altar to the Lord (Gen 3:18). The offering of Melchizedek is found in Gen 14:18. Even human sacrifice was possible (Gen 22:2)! Jacob's anointing of the stone points to a common practice in Ancient Near East (Gen 28:18). But it was with the construction of the temple in Jerusalem by Solomon that the cultic practices became well organized. In the Mosaic law we see ample evidence to show that there was divine sanction for the cultic practices. But can it be presumed that the different cultic practices were all divinely dictated ones?

The most important of the cultic practices is sacrifice. Israelite sacrifices resemble the patterns and systems of surrounding cultures of the ANE. The sacrificial rites were not original creation of Yahwistic religion but they were adopted from Canaanite sacral practices. The history of the different sacrifices with their rituals show that they were

the point showing the relationship of Prov 22:17-24:22 with the Instruction of Amenomope, p. 264-267. Cf. also Anthony R. Ceresko, *Psalmist and Sages: Studies in Old Testament Poetry and Religion,* ITS Supplements 2, (Bangalore: St. Peter's Institute, 1994) p. 131.

22   Cf. K.J. Gabriel, "Cultic and Prophetic Cultures" p. 233. For another perspective on culture cf. Anto Karokaran, " Proclaiming Jesus' Uniqueness in the Context of Cultural Nationalism" *Millennium* VII (2004) p. 45-46. Cf. Roland De Vaux. *Ancient Israel,* p. 271.

of ancient origin. This can be established by comparing Israelite ritual with the rituals of other religions, in which there are similar ceremonies. But a related question arises: did Israel borrow its rites from the cultural background of the neighbouring Semitic peoples? According to Roland De Vaux, the connection with other nations, belonging to more distant races and lands are either accidental or secondary.[23] But the influence of the Canaanite practices upon Israel is stronger hypothesis. Perhaps when they settled in Canaan Israelites adopted from the Canaanites the sacrifices *"olah* and *zebah* which were burned upon the altar; they then combined these sacrifices with ancient rites about the use of blood. After this interaction the Israelite ritual developed independently.[24]

The cult objects of greatest importance for Israel such as the Ark of the Covenant go back to the nomadic origins of Israel. Likewise the important feasts of Israel to which cultic practices are intimately linked also are of antique origin. But the bulk of Israel's ritual life and its priestly tradition is taken in through amalgamation with Canaan. From Canaan came the psalmody and all the cultic and royal traditions which sustained psalmody.[25] Monarchic period is the most significant stage when this process of interaction, got integrated because there was the centralization of cult due to the construction of the temple and the establishment of royalty. The king, sanctified by his anointing and adopted by Yahweh was a sacred person. But even though he regulated the cult (2 Sam 24:25), and sometimes he himself performed cultic functions (I Sam 13:9-10; 2 Sam 6:13, 17-18; 24:25; I Kings 3:4,15; 8:5, 62-64; 9:25), the king himself was never considered a priest. Anointing does not give to the king a priestly character.[26] The part played by the king in the regulation and supervision of worship or the nomination of the priests does not exceed the prerogatives which the sovereign ruler had on the religion. This is true even with regard to the royal psalm 110 where it is stated of the king "you are a priest forever." (Ps 110: 4).

In the early stages of monarchy there was deeper and more frequent interaction with the neighbouring nations. David married Maakah,

23   For details, cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 432-433. Cf. also, Roland De Vaux. *Old Testament Theology*, Vol I (London: Longman and Todd, 1962), p. 24-25.

24   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 441.

25   Cf. Bruce Vawter, "Israel's Encounter with the Nations", p. 85.

26   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 113-114.

facts of cultural interaction between Israel and her neighbouring nations not simply of literary fabrication but facts of solid historical foundation. The Biblical revelation as it has actualized in history is inseparably intertwined with human culture. Human culture is a dynamic reality constantly refining human persons. Values of human culture are assumed by God to reveal His own mystery, His plans and His holy will because every authentic culture is, in fact, in its own way, the bearer of universal values established by God.[36] Inter-culturation is intrinsic to the salvation history, from the very moment when Abraham was called to be the recipient of the covenant blessings for the good of all the nations (Gen 12:1-3). This process continued and culminated in the incarnation of the Word: the Christ-event.[37] The manifestation of this divine plan fully realized in Christ continues in and through the Church, which interacts with all peoples and integrates all that is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing and commendable (cf. Phil 4:8).

In this survey of the historical sources of the monarchic period, some important areas of interactions of Israelite cultural life and the cultural life of different peoples are identified. The process of the articulation of the faith of Israel, the cultic expression of this faith, the establishment of the monarchy as well as its administrative and military set up, the good ordering of civic life on a solid legal ground, the evolution of the art and architecture and the evolution of religious and popular festivals are areas treated in this study. The influence of the neighbouring cultures on the cultural life of Israel has been emphasized. During the monarchic period, without doubt, substantial integration of the Israelite culture has taken place. The neighbouring cultures have definitely influenced this integration. It is difficult to pin point the cultures as more active or passive. But the Biblical sources show very clearly that every kind of religious syncretism under the disguise of cultural integration were periodically discerned and rejected especially under the guidance of the prophets. We have already pointed out I Kings 18 as

36   "The theological foundation of inculturation is the conviction of faith that the Word of God transcends the cultures in which it has found expression and has the capability of being spread in other cultures in such a way as to be able to reach all human beings in the cultural context in which they live". The Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1994) p. 117. Cf. John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli,* No. 21, AAS, 77 (1985) p. 21.

37   *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,* p. J18.

a good illustration of this resistance. 2 Kings 17:24-41 is another illustration of this rejection in the later monarchic period, where a syncretist religious culture developed in Samaria. Israel knew how to reject as well as to accept. Assimilation, not uncritical adaptation, is seen in this process of cultural interaction and cultural integration. The struggle against Baalism and the war against perverse religious practices such as cult prostitution, immolation of infants, superstition of magic etc. are expression of this religious discernment of Israel.

The influence of the Israelite culture on the nations at the very beginning of monarchy is made clear in I Kings 10:1-10 where the visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon's palace is described. This representative of the nations wondered at Solomon's prosperity. "When the queen of Sheba had observed all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, there valets and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her" (1 Kings 10:5)[38] Even when the concern of the Deutronomist writer to idealize Solomon is admitted, the influence of the Israelite culture upon other nations is evident in this text. In 2 Chr.17:10 there is information about king Jehoshaphat's royal excellence.[39] 2 Chr 32:27-31 testifies to the cultural initiatives of king Hezekiah. Israel had cultural excellence by the end of the monarchy. Prophet Ezekiel puts this deep cultural relationship in these words: "Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites, your father was an Ammonite, and your mother a Hittite" (Ezek 16:3). The prophets constantly called for rejection of the Canaanite and foreign religious faith and their cultic practices. But several aspects of the Canaanite culture had already been inseparably assimilated into the life of Israel as a chosen nation which, in the course of history made Israel a highly civilized people.[40]

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38   Martin Noth mentions about the 'Solomonic - Post Solomonic humanism. Cf. Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: Adam and Charles Block, 1976). "Israel's Intellectual and Cultural Life under David and Solomon", p. 216-224.

39   For a detailed analysis of the cultural initiatives of king Jehoshaphat, cf. Gary N. Knoppers, "Reform and Regression: The Chroniclers Presentation of Jehoshaphat," *Biblica*, 72(1991) p. 500-524.

40   Cf. Mathew Vellanickal, " Biblical Background of Inter-religious Dialogue", p. 111.

sensibilities during the centuries of its early history. It was during the monarchic period that Israel developed its expertise in the field of architecture. The art of building houses, fortified cities with the infrastructures, the sanctuaries and so on flourished during this period. Now excavators are investigating the sites of Israelite cities and studying the parity or disparity between the Israelite architecture and that of the neighbouring nations. At the time of the occupation, there were well-fortified cities in Palestine. The destruction of Jericho and Ai are well known events of the period of conquest (Josh 6:1-27; 8:1-23). The consolidation of monarchic reign under David was boosted with the capture of Jerusalem from the Jebusites (2 Sam 5:6-10). He reorganized the kingdom making Jerusalem as the capital. The architectural ventures of David and his successors very much depended on the expertise of the neighbours. David's court was Egyptian.[31] Imitating the Egyptian palaces, using the expertise of Hiram, king of Tyre, of the Phoenicians, king David built his palace (2 Sam 5:11; I Chr 14:1).

The most important thing is the temple of Jerusalem, the sole religious centre during the entire period of monarchy, even when the heterodox cultic centres of Dan and Bethel established by Jeroboam are acknowledged (I Kings 12:29). The Pentateuchal sources of later times give all the details of the temple in a theocratic tone. But the cultural affinity of the temple of Jerusalem to the Phoenician temples is widely admitted.[32] The historical books testify that king Solomon sought the architectural and artistic expertise of Hiram of Tyre in constructing the temple of Jerusalem (I Kings 5:1-10, 18; 2 Chr 2:3-10). The name of the main artist from Tyre is also mentioned (I Kings 7:13; 2 Chr 2:13-14).

Religious and Popular Festivals

Another important area of cultural interpenetration is the temporal cycle with religious and popular festivals. In origin as well as in content festivals have great bearing on the history and onward movement of

31   Cf. Mathew Vellanickal, "Biblical Background of Inter-religious Dialogue", p. 107.

32   It was customary to see Egyptian influence on Solomon's temple. More recent excavations show that it is constructed according to the Syro-Phoenician architecture." Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p 317. M. Eliade suggests that the Israelite sanctuaries had been built after the Canaanite models. Cf. Mircea Ellade, A History of Religious Ideas, p. 76.

every community which keeps them. The annual rhythm of the people of Israel has been characterized by many celebrations and festivals. The weekly Sabbath, the annual feasts as well as special days of celebrations in Israel have been influenced by the culture of the neighbouring nations. All these celebrations had great theological content in Israel. But their origin has a complex history. The practice of Sabbath observance, as well as the celebration of the great feasts of Passover-unleavened bread, of Weeks and of Tents was established much before the monarchic period.[33] The origin of all these events in the temporal cycle of Israel is greatly disputed. But the influence of the practices of the neighbouring people certainly has contributed to the concrete form of the weekly, monthly and annual celebrations of the people of Israel. During the monarchic period adaptations, as needed, have taken place. For example it was during the monarchic period the 'rest' aspect of Sabbath got greater emphasis. It got the character of a joyful feast (Isa 1:13; Hos 2:13). People visited sanctuaries and went to consult men of God (2 Kings 4:23). Commercial transactions were interrupted (Am 8:5). Sabbath was the day for changing the guard at the place and the temple (2 Kings 11.5-8).[34]

Something proper to the monarchic period, as suggested by certain scholars, is the introduction of a new feast in imitation of the New Year Feast of some of the neighbours of Israel: the 'New Year Feast of Yahweh' or the 'Feast of the Enthronement of Yahweh' or 'Feast of the Kingship of Yahweh'. Scholars have tried to reconstruct the details of this feast, and suggest the Babylonian influence for its introduction in Israel. Traces of some cultic customs in some of the psalms are cited (Ps 47, 93, 96-99): they call these Psalms as 'Psalms of the Enthronement of Yahweh'. Though a festival of this title is unlikely in Israel, a celebration of the reign of Yahweh cannot be ruled out (2 Sam 6:1-23; I Kings 8:1-3; Ps 24, 132). Inter-culturation has certainly influenced Israelite festivals.[35]

Conclusion

In this article, investigations on the dynamics of inter-culturation in the Israelite history, more specifically of the monarchic period, are attempted. The survey of the sources has brought to light some important

33   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 1479-502.
34.   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 482.
35   Cf. Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 1504-505

while being firmly rooted in itself picks up and chooses elements from
the new culture or religion and tries to integrate them. 3) Encounter by
Assimilation. This is an extreme process in which the independence
and self-identity of the assimilated are lost. All the assimilated elements
become parts of a whole.

Dr. Wilfred says that none of the above models present a genuine
process of inter-cultural encounter. Therefore he proposes a different
model, which he calls *the dialogical model*. Here there is communication
"'across cultures, philosophies and religions at the micro as well as the
macro level, in order to create greater understanding, consensus and
co-operation among peoples. It is animated by the increasing awareness
of the limitations of one's world-view, religious and philosophical
insights."[6]

As Dr. Wilfred has noted, it is only in the dialogical model of inter-
cultural encounter that the two cultures enter into real dialogue,
understand each other, give and receive from each other, and thus make
a joint quest to arrive at the Truth. Here there is encounter at the level of
religion and philosophy, which concretely means "communication at
the level of root paradigms, foundational values and dominant symbols"[7].
This is genuine interculturation that one should aim at.

Interculturation in the Exilic and Post-exilic Periods

We do not find a clear example of genuine interculturation as proposed
above, in the Bible in the pre-exilic, exilic or post-exilic periods. What
we find is a confluence of different cultures, or to use the terms of Dr.
Wilfred, a cultural encounter mainly by *absorption*,[8] that is without losing
Israel's basic faith in YHWH. This is all the more true regarding the
exilic and post-exilic periods, because more than any other stage in the
history of Israel the exilic and post-exilic periods witnessed a strong .
adherence to the *Torah,* probably because of the cultic reforms of Josiah
after the discovery of the Book of Law and the formation of
Deuteronornistic theology (2 Kings 22:3-23,25)

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6   Felix Wilfred, 43

7   Felix Wilfred, 44

8   Felix Wilfred, 42. There was an attempt to impose the Hellenistic culture and
        religion upon the Jews by king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, which ended up in
        the Maccabean revolt.

The Exilic and Post-exilic Political Environment

Before we enter into a discussion on the inter-cultural encounter of Israel and the Nations during exile and later it is important to situate the Babylonian exile in the political history of the Ancient Near East. After the reign of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal the power of Assyria steadily weakened and during the years 614-612 it fell under the combined attack of Medes and Neo-Babylonians. Nabopolassar was the founder of the neo-Babylonian empire. Nebuchadnezzar II, one of the greatest kings in Babylonian history, succeeded him. When Johoiakim (608-598), the son of Josiah refused to pay tribute, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and during the siege Jehoiakim was killed. His son Johoiakin was placed on the throne, but the city of Jerusalem surrendered after a few months, probably on March 16, 597. This led to the first deportation of Judah. The king, the high officials and leading citizens, among whom was also the prophet Ezekiel (2 Kings 24: 8ff), together with an enormous booty were taken to Babylon. Though Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah, the uncle of Jehoiakin the ruler, his reign was a period of continued agitation and sedition. Besides, Zedekiah did not obey the vassal agreement. All these led to the second siege of Jerusalem, which resulted in the destruction of the temple, palace and the city, and the mass deportation of the people to Babylon. This marked the final end of the state of Judah, that is the definitive loss of political independence, and Judah became a Babylonian province.

Immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, Gedaliah, a Judean was appointed governor of Judah with his residence at Mizpah. When Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, later killed him, many Judeans including captains of the forces fled to Egypt (2 Kings 25: 22-26). There is a tradition that prophet Jeremiah also was among them (Jer 42-43).

Babylonian power in the Fertile Crescent, however, did not last long. The political strength of the empire steadily declined after the death of Nebuchadnezzar almost twenty years after the fall of Jerusalem. His successor Nabonidus is considered the last Babylonian ruler though for some years he had left the affairs of the government in the hands of Belsharusur (Belshazzar), the crown prince. Nabonidus' policies brought great dissension in the empire, especially his opposition to the priests of Marduk, who were very powerful economically and spiritually. As John Bright points out, during this time "Babylon was a land divided against

Israel in the Exilic and Post-exilic Times
A Study on Interculturation

Mathew Manakatt

Exile was a turning point in the history of Israel and that period was one of the most fertile time of interculturation. There were a lot of assimilations, identifications, selections, rejections, reinterpretations etc. during this period of Israel in relation to other cultures. The study is an attempt to trace back those streams of interculturation.

Introduction

Before we begin to speak about "Interculturation in the Exilic and Post-exilic Period" in the history of Israel, a clarification of the basic term of discussion seems very important in order to understand the nature of the inter-cultural encounter of the specific periods. Inter-culturation" is a very recent term in theological discussions, especially in the context of inculturation and mission theology. Though already in 1980 Joseph Blomjous, the Dutch bishop of Mwanza, Tanzania, and important spokesman at the Second Vatican Council had proposed that instead of "inculturation" missionaries should speak about "interculturation"[1], the concept did not find its way into serious theological discussions, except, perhaps, in the writings of Dr. Frans Wijsen[2] in the Netherlands, and Felix Wilfred in India, and some African writers.

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1   Cf. J. Blomjous, "Development in Mission Thinking and Practice, 1959-1980. Inculturation and Interculturation", in: *African Ecclesial Review* 22 (1980/6) 293-298.

2   Dr. Frans Wijsen is a Professor of Missiology and Director of the Graduate School of Theology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen.

Taking a closer look at the expression, the prefix 'inter' means 'between', 'from one to the other'. If so, "inter-cultural" refers to the understanding between two or more different cultures, which should lead to their mutual giving and receiving. Understood in this way, can we identify "inter-cultural" and "multi-cultural"? In other words, can we speak of interculturation as a confluence of different cultures? However, this distinction does not seem to be entertained by the proponents of interculturation, Dr. Frans Wijsen describes the term in the following way. "Interculturation expresses the idea that the process of inculturation is not simply the interaction between the gospel on the one hand and culture on the other, as if they represent two monolithic meaning systems, but between multiple cultural orientations."[3]

It is Dr. Felix Wilfred who approaches the concept systematically and presents a deeper understanding of interculturation. He discusses the expression in the context of the inadequacy of the project of inculturation as generally understood and practiced, pointing out that it does not pose the difficult question of the meeting of two worlds in depth, with different approaches to reality." It limits to culling out certain elements, symbols and other expressions from the culture and makes them the vehicle for the transmission of a predefined Christian faith and its ideals. What we need to do is to move from inculturation to *inter-cultural encounter*."[4] According to Dr. Wilfred interculturation rests on a wider conception of culture. "Here culture is viewed as a particular structure of cognition and expression in such a way that the approach to reality and acquisition of knowledge are shaped and conditioned by culturally given structures".[5] He looks into the different ways in which encounter between cultures has taken place in history and groups them mainly as three models. 1) Encounter by *Imposition*. Here the powerful nation imposes its culture and religion upon the conquered nation. But here there is no inter-relationship between both and hence no real inter-cultural encounter. 2) Encounter by *Absorption*. Here a culture or religion

3   Dr. Frans Wijsen, "Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church", Paper presented at an international conference on Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church at the University of Nijmegen on 7 March 2001.

4   Felix Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges: Doing Contextual Theology* (Delhi 2002) 39-40.

5   Felix Wilfred, 40

itself and ill-prepared to face national emergency"[9]. Meanwhile, Medes had become a great power and a threat to Babylon. However, the brilliant rise of Cyrus the Persian to power caused an upheaval in the political arena. He was a vassal king of Anshan in southern Iran and of a house related to the Median kings. By 550 he took over the vast Median Empire and established a Median-Persian Empire. In 547 he marched against Lydia and swept across upper Mesopotamia releasing that area frm the control of Babylon. Later in 539 Cyrus entered Babylon in all triumph and the people are said to have received him as their liberator. Soon Cyrus brought the whole of the Babylonian Empire under his control , even up to the Egyptian border.

Emperor Cyrus considered himself the instrument of God to bring peace and stability in the area, and that the whole world was entrusted to him (Ezra 1:2). His policy was one of great tolerance. The religious traditions of the subject peoples were respected and indigenous cults were promoted. Accordingly in the very first year of his taking over of the land he ordered the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem and the return of the gold and silver vessels that were taken to Babylon. "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up" (2 Chro 36: 23; Ezra 1:2-4).[10] The divine author presents this proclamation as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah.

The return of exiles took place gradually and in large groups. Cyrus placed the restoration charge in the hands of Sheshbazzar, prince of Persia. According to Ezra 2 it took place under Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah etc, whereas according to Ezra 7, 11ff the return was under the leadership of Ezra as commissioned by King Artaxerxes. Most probably these are different stages of the restoration. However, it is only logical and natural to assume that many did not return especially those who had married foreign wives, had become very rich and had a lot of properties in the new land. They helped the return of their brothers financially. Some 40000 exiles are supposed to have returned to their native country (Ezra 1-2). The rebuilding of the temple was completed

9   John Bright, *A History of Israel* (SCM, London, 1980) 354

10   The *edict of Cyrus* is preserved by Ezra 6:1-5 in Aramaic

in 515, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king (Ezra 6:15). The walls of the city of Jerusalem were rebuilt almost a century later.

The Persian domination lasted only for about 200 years. Alexander the great of Macedonia (336-323) defeated Darius, the king of the Persians and Medes (1 Macc 1:1-2) and inaugurated the Hellenistic period. After his death in 323 "his officers began to rule, each in his own place. They all put on crowns..." (1 Macc 1:8-9) as a result of which there were quarrels and confusion in the land. Later, Palestine became part of the realm of Ptolemies (301-198), and then part of the kingdom of Seleucids (198-64).[11] When the country was under the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164) whom the 1 Macc 1:10 qualifies as "a sinful root" there took place the Maccabean revolt in order to expel the foreign cults. In 64 BC Palestine became a Roman province.

Inter-cultural Encounter in the Exilic and Post-exilic Periods

As we saw in the foregoing historical survey, after 597 the People of God encountered different nations and peoples. They were the Babylonians, the Persians (and the Medians), the Greeks, the Egyptians (2 Kings 25:22-26) the Ptolemians, the Seleucids and the Romans, mainly the first three. Though under political subjugation, the encounter with these peoples naturally led the Hebrew people into a lot of cultural interaction. This was mainly through external attraction and sometimes through external compulsion. The result was that the Jews absorbed[12] a lot of cultural (artistic, literary, philosophical and religious) elements from the encountering peoples, especially from the Babylonians and the Hellenists. The different books of the Bible testify to this fact, as we shall see below. The inter-cultural elements of the exilic and post-exilic encounters found in the Bible are comparatively more than that of other periods because majority of the OT books were probably composed during these periods. Though the *Torah* existed before the exilic times, the codification of the different books of the Pentateuch probably took place during the exilic and post-exilic periods. So the influence of the Neo-Babylonian culture could be found also in the books of the *Torah*.

The Babylonian Legacy

Speaking about the inter-cultural encounter of the exilic and post-

11   Werner H. Schmidt, *Old Testament Introduction,* trans. Matthew J. Q'Connel (St. Pauls, Bombay, 1992) 31.

12.   See above p. 2.

exilic periods it is not easy to specify accurately the legacies of the Babylonians, Persians, and the Hellenists. Many of the cultural elements were common, especially to the Neo-Babylonian and Persian cultures. It is important to bear this in mind in the following discussions. However, it was from the Neo-Babylonian culture that the Jews absorbed more.

Babylonia was a great civilization in southern Mesopotamia, which is often qualified as the "Cradle of Civilization". Situated between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers Babylonia flourished from the middle of the third through the late first millennium BC. In the Bible known as Shiñar (Gen 11:12; 14:1.9; Josh 7:12) and the "land of the Chaldeans" (Jer 24:5; Ezek 12:13) the name Babylonia was given to the nation by the Greeks, following the name of the capital Babylon. Babylonia was also the home of the ancient Sumerian and Akkadian cultures, known after Sumer and Akkad, the most important cities of the northern and southern territories.

Cultural interaction between Babylonians and the Hebrews had begun even from the time of Abraham who himself was from Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 11:27-31). But this was more indirect transmission through the Canaanites. The absoption of Babylonian cultural elements by the Jews took place mainly during the exilic period. There are a number of lengthy records of Nebuchadnezzar concerning the buildings he erected, as well as of other public acts, but unfortunately only a fragment of a historical inscription referring to him has been found. The building inscriptions portray him as the great builder. He transformed Babylon into the mistress of the civilized world.

The Babylonian culture and civilization were known for the famous invention and development of cuneiform script, law codes, the most famous of which is the Hammurabi code, treaties, epic texts, omen literature, texts of astronomy, religious poems, proverbs and wisdom sayings, fairy tales and fables, songs, prayers etc. There were also scribal schools where records of administrative activities, correspondence, legal transactions, royal edicts, legal transactions, mathematical texts, lists of plants, animals and minerals in cuneiform script and the already mentioned documents and literary pieces were kept. Let us take some of the cultural elements one by one, especially those absorbed by the Jews during the exilic period.

Legal Codes

The OT books contain a lot of laws and legal precepts. Some of them were codified and preserved as the Book of the Covenant, the Holiness Code, the Priestly Code etc. in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. Though these laws are meaningful in themselves and suited to the contexts for which they were codified, a good number of them pre-existed the present codes. They were at least partially taken over by Israelites from the neighbouring nations, especially Babylonians, Assyrians and Hittites. As O. Eissfeldt states, both in form and content such regulations closely resemble the legal precepts of these nations.[13] This is true especially about the casuistic laws set out in objective conditional style with "if/when" clause common to the Babylonian casuistic regulations, as we have in Exod 21:2-4. Besides, there are also a lot of cultic ordinances and sacrificial lists in Exodus and Leviticus, which were also influenced by the Babylonian ritual laws.

In some OT texts we have examples of contracts and agreements. Eg: Gen 21:22-32 (between Abraham and Abimelech); Gen 31:43-54 (between Jacob and Laban); Josh 9:15 (between Joshua and the Gibonites). A real record of similar contracts is preserved in 1 Macc 8:20-32 that is clearly of the post-exilic period.

Epic Texts and Myths

"If a narrative is concerned with the world of gods or if gods are to a considerable extent involved in it", one could say that it is a myth.[14] If this is true real myths could not have originated in Israel on account of her strong monotheistic faith. But there are a lot of mythical elements in the OT books like the Pentateuch, mainly in the creation narratives and descriptions of theophany. These mythical elements must have come from outside. In this regard bible scholars would agree that the majority of the mythical elements in the book of Genesis came from Babylonian Epics, though influence of the creation stories of other religions cannot be ruled out. Enuma Elish and Gilgamesh epic were the most important and most popular epics of Mesopotamia among others. The former is mainly the Babylonian epic of creation, the latter the flood story of

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13   O. Eissfeldt, *Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (Oxford, 1974) 26.

14   O. Eissfeldt, 33.

destruction. According to it the creation of the heavens and earth was the result of a struggle between Marduk, the main god of Babylonia, and Tiamat, the evil goddess. During the fight Marduk cut the evil goddess into two parts. From the upper part of the body of Tiamat was formed the heavens and from the lower part, the earth.

It is beyond doubt that there is a profound difference between the Babylonian story and the Genesis account of creation. If according to Enuma Elish the heaven and earth were the bye-products of a struggle between two gods, in Genesis they were the result of a positive decision of God. However, several connections to the Babylonian creation myth could be pointed out. For example, the main concepts contained in Ge 1:2 are usually interpreted in terms of the Babylonian mythological conceptions. The Hebrew word for "the deep" (RSV) is *t^ehom*. It is assumed that this word had linguistic affinity with Tiamat the Babylonian goddess who is also the monster of the *abyss.* Similarly *tohu* and *bohu* could also be related to the mythical character 'monster of *Chaos'.* If so creation could be considered the victory of YHWH over "formless void", or the monster of *Chaos.* As Claus Westermann has noted, there are a number of texts in the OT, which refer to the struggle with Chaos. The clearest of these are Is 51:9-10 and Ps 89:10-15. These texts belong to a group of the laments of the people where they remind God of what he had done earlier, that is, the conquering of the powers of Chaos, in order to move Him to intervene in the present distress. "God's present action is thus brought into contact with an ancient and widely spread tradition from outside Israel, one strand of which linked the Chaos struggle with creation..."[15]

Though in the biblical account *creatio ex nihilo* is stressed (e.g., by the repeated use of the verb *bara*), the act of separation is very much connected with the creative acts (Gen 1:4.6.7.9.18). In Enuma Elish the act of separation "is the act that is the basis of creation: Marduk provides the corpse of Tiamat... out of one part he makes the heavens, out of the other the earth".[16]

Literary connections are also noted between the Genesis account of creation and the other creation narratives. For example, the introductory clause of the creation narrative of Gen 1:1 could be translated, "In the

15   Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, 1984) 33.

16   Claus Westermann, 33.

beginning *when God created the heavens and the earth....*" In fact *NRSV* has accepted this as the primary translation, though *RSV* and Genesis scholars like G. von Rad and C. Westermann have taken the clause as an independent sentence. The formulation as a temporal clause could have been influenced by the fixed, stereotyped introductory formula of the creation narratives of other religions and cultures, "When this and this was not yet... then...."[17]. This type of formulation is found also in Gen 2:4-7.

The flood story of Genesis (chs. 6-8) seems to contain mythical elements from the Gilgamesh Epic, the Babylonian story of the Flood. Though a direct dependence of the biblical tradition in the Babylonian is no longer assumed, a material relationship between both cannot be denied. "Both versions are independent arrangements of a still older tradition, which itself stemmed perhaps from the Sumerian".[18]

Fairy-tales and Fables

The OT especially the narratives about prophets contain a considerable number of fairy tales and fables. The most important are those connected with Elijah and Elisha in 1Kings 17:1-7, 8-16; 2 Kings 4:1-7 etc. Other examples are in the story of Jonah and the juridical parable of Nathan in 2 Sam 12:1-4. Probably the fables and fairy tales of Babylonia and Assyria have influenced their formulations.

Wisdom Sayings and Proverbs

A lot of wisdom sayings and proverbs are found in the Bible, especially in the wisdom literature. It is generally accepted that the books of this section belong to the post-exilic times. Though much of the material might have come from earlier sources, new materials were also probably added to what pre-existed. For the newly added sayings the wisdom sayings of Babylonia, Persia and the Hellenistic sources with which the Jewish people were quite familiar in the exilic and post-exilic times were naturally made use of.

Songs and Religious Hymns

There are different types of songs in the OT, like cultic songs, victory songs, mocking songs, religious hymns etc. The cultic songs are mainly

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17   Claus Westermann, 45.

18   G. Von Rad, *Genesis* (OTL, London, 1981) 124.

psalms like Ps. 2; 18; 20; 72; 101; 110 and 132. Some of them contain divine oracles imparted to the king assuring him of God's help, even adoption by God. For example Ps 2:7-8 reads thus:

> [7]I will tell of the decree of the Lord:
> He said to me, "You are my son,
>   today I have begotton you.
> [8]Ask of me, and I will make the nations
>   your heritage,
> and the ends of the earth your
>   possessions."

This assurance to the king from the part of God is better understood in the background of similar texts from Babylonia and Assyria. As Arthur Weiser points out, "the form of this oracle follows prototypes of the ancient Orient which were adopted by the royal ritual of Jerusalem"[19]. The Egyptian concept that Pharaoh is the physical offspring of God may also be behind this oracle. But the expression, "Today I have begotten you" refers not to the physical birth of the king but to the enthronement ceremony of the king. Some of these songs originally attached with cultic ceremonies were later detached from the context and used as spiritual songs. O. Eissfeldt explains how some of the cultic songs became part of the psalms. "Exilic and post-exilic Judaism interpreted and utilized a whole series of ancient cultic songs in this way as spiritual songs, and this explains how they came to be taken up into the Psalter...."[20]

Another type of songs in the Bible is the Mocking Songs. E.g., Is 36: 22-29; 44:12-20, 47 etc. Mocking songs were used as terrible political weapons for the ancient people in times of war. They belong to *mašal* and are related to victory in war. There were also pure victory songs, as we find in 1 Macc 14:4-15 and the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah 9 and 11. Probably the divine author got them from Babylonian, Persian and Greek contexts.

The Sabbath and New Moon

Some of the Jewish feasts and festivals have their roots in the culture of neighbouring nations. Among these, the observance of Sabbath and

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19   Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms* (OTL, London, 1982) p. 113.
20   O. Eissfeldt, p. 105

the feast of the New Moon have a strong background in the Babylonian culture. The Hebrew name *šbt* seems to be virtually identical with the Babylonian name *šabattū*. This name denoted a particular day for the Babylonians, designated specifically as the "day of quieting of the heart".[21] Though the precise meaning of this expression is uncertain, probably the connotation of relaxation is there. Besides, every seventh day was for the Babylonians an inauspicious day, though such an implication is not there in Sabbath. Then in, Babylonia the day of the full moon was considered particularly auspicious.[22] Though in Israel Sabbath was not related to moon, we see that new moon and Sabbath are mentioned together in several contexts in Is 1:13, and Ezek 46:1; Hosea 2:11; Amos 8:5 etc. The feast of the New Moon was probably the original form of the Sabbath, before Sabbath was separated from the lunar cycle[23]. The law specified an amount of sacrifices to be offered at the feast of the New Moon (Num 10:10).

Hymns

Many of the Psalms are hymns. They are songs that praise the glory and greatness of YHWH for the marvels revealed in nature and history. Some examples are Ps 8;19; 29; 33; 65; 67; 100; 103 and 150. Though the content of the hymns are relating to YHWH, the God of Israel, their external forms were probably borrowed by Israel from her environment. Ps 18:3; 35:10 and 71:19 have parallels in Babylonian hymnology[24]. Among prophets Deutero-Isaiah has certain hymns praising the unique greatness and glory of God also as expressions of personal piety. For example Is 42:10-12; 44:23; 52:9-10. It is reasonable to think that the prophet who probably lived in the Babylonian exile was influenced by the Babylonian hymn style. It seems very clear in texts like 44:24-28 where YHWH describes himself. The author probably takes from the Babylonian style of gods' self-description.

The Style of Babylonian Poetry

Parallelism and the frequent use of repetition were the special characteristics of Babylonian poetry. Every student of OT knows that

21   J. Morgenstern, "Sabbath", *IDB*, vol. 4, p. 135.

22   Allen C. Myers, 897.

23   J. C. Rylaarsdam, "Feasts and Fasts", *IDB*, vol. 2, p. 262.

24   O. Eissfeldt, 105-106.

these are also typical of the Hebrew style. There is every possibility that the Jews absorbed these characteristics from the Babylonian style.

Letters

In several books of the OT we have letterforms. Some of them are preserved in fragments and others intact. They are mainly found in the historical books from the monarchical period till the Roman period. To cite a few examples, 2 Sam 11:14-15 refers to the letter sent by David to Joab, the chief of the army, concerning Uriah. 1 Kings 21:8-10; 2 Kings 5:5-6, 10:1-3 etc., are other examples. A comparison with the Mari letters, Amarna letters, Hittite letters etc., would prove that the letter style present in the above-cited texts is closely related to that of Babylonia and Canaan.

The Apocalyptic Literature

The book of Daniel, which describes the experiences of Daniel and his friends in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, is written in the apocalyptic literary style. It is quite possible that the apocalyptic literature has its origin in the Babylonian prophecies.

Trade and Commerce

Life in Babylon opened up for many Jews opportunities to enter into business and trade. Naturally they came into contact with great centers of world culture and learning as well as international business centers. Thereby some of them became immensely rich and influential. Probably these were the people who did not want to go back to Palestine.

Encounter with the Persian Culture

As noted earlier, it is not easy to clearly differentiate the influence of the Persian culture upon the Jews of the exilic and post-exilic periods from the Neo-Babylonian culture, because the Persian culture itself was to a great extent influenced by the Babylonians. However, certain points are to be highlighted.

Aramaic Language and Aramaism

Though Aramaic was the dominant language of trade and diplomacy in the Neo-Babylonian empire also; it was in the Persian Empire, i.e., mainly during the post-exilic period, till 300 BC, that it reached its zenith as an official language. So when we speak about the Persian legacy it is

the Aramaic language and its influence upon Hebrew (Aramaism) that first come into our minds. Though its use and influence declined with the coming of the Greek language and Hellenistic culture, some dialects of Aramaic continued in use in some isolated areas, and a variety of Aramaic survives in the Near East even today.

The influence of Aramaic upon the Hebrews is clearly evidenced by its usage in certain OT passages: Ezra 4:8-6, 18; 7:12-26; Dan 2: 4b-7, 28; Gen 31:47; and Jer 10:11. The language of these portions has been called Biblical Aramaic, which is basically the official Aramaic dialect of the Persian Empire. In Gen 31:47 Laban uses an Aramaic word parallel to a Hebrew expression by Jacob, in the context of the covenant between them. In Jer 10:11 the prophet is using an Aramaic sentence, which is a gloss, while he is addressing the nations. The Aramaic passages in Ezra and Daniel are in diplomatically important contexts. Ezra 4:8-6, 18 relate to official correspondence between local officials and the Persian kings, Artaxerxes and Darius regarding the rebuilding of Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 4:7 and 6:1). Ezra 6:1 refers to the search for the famous *edict of king Cyrus,* which was discovered in the archives of Ecbatana.[25] This royal decree in the original Aramaic text is given in Ezra 6:1-5. Ezra 7:12-26 is also a very official document, the edict issued by king Artaxerxes to Ezra, releasing the Jews from exile together with the immense treasure deported from Jerusalem. The Aramaic portions of Daniel include the accounts of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the story of the three comrades of Daniel, the feast given by king Belshazzar, the description of Daniel thrown into the den of lions etc. Dan 4:1-37 is a letter of Nebuchadnezzar addressing all the nations and peoples of the earth.

The influence of Aramaic was not limited to the referred Aramaic texts. During the exile and after, many Jews were forced to learn Aramaic due to the circumstances of their life, necessitated by business and diplomatic connections. A good part of the new generations in the Diasporas could not read and understand Hebrew. Therefore the Bible was translated into Aramaic (Targums) for a second reading in the synagogues. The *Targum Onkelos* and *Targum Jonathan* are important versions of the OT. Besides, the influence of Aramaic upon the Hebrew language is evident in the books of Job and Qoheleth.

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25   This document is given partially in 2 Chr 36:23 and Ezra 1:2-4 but in Hebrew.

A discussion about the Jews' encounter with the Persian culture may not be complete without a tribute to king Cyrus. His personality, his tolerant and benevolent nature, his respect of other cultures and peoples, his deep faith in God etc., all reflected in his edict (Ezra 6:1-5), left a deep and lasting impression in the mind of every Jew, so much so that he was even hailed as the anointed (Dan 9:25-26; Is 45:1) and the chosen deliverer and shepherd of Israel (Is 44:28). There were also Jews who saw in the rise of Cyrus to power the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy (Is 7:14).

Hellenistic Culture

The expression 'Hellenistic culture' refers to the Greek civilization diffused through out the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean world by the conquests of Alexander the Great (336-323 BC). The most important cultural elements of Hellenism were the Greek language, which soon became the official language of the civilized world, and the concept and establishment of city-states. The Greek cities were very carefully planned, typically featuring a market place, long, colonnaded boulevards, temples, theatres, baths and a gymnasium. The Hellenistic city-states were conducive to the Greek ideals of free thought and the development of the intellect, particularly in terms of philosophy, science, literature and arts.[26] Naturally the Jews of Palestine as well as those of the Diaspora were attracted to the new culture and absorbed many of its elements, both positive and negative. Many of them learned Greek, which finally resulted in the production of the LXX in the second century BC, mainly for the Greek speaking Jews of Alexandria.

In some places the Jews were thoroughly hellenized, both by absorbing negative elements of the new culture and also by compulsion from the part of the rulers. For example, in 1 Macc 1:11-15 we read how some lawless Israelites misled many by making a covenant with the Gentiles, which even led to the undoing of circumcision and the abandoning of the holy Covenant. Some managed to keep their identity solely through the observance of the law and synagogue worship. Even this was very challenging, especially when rulers like Antiochus IV Epiphanes followed a policy of compulsion even in religious matters.

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26   Allen C. Myers, ed. *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987) 479

However, devout Jews were not ready to compromise their faith. There was strong resistance from them when Antiochus compelled them to offer sacrifice to the pagan God Zeus (1 Macc 1:41-64). This resulted in the Maccabean revolt, which succeeded in defeating the attempt to hellenize Judaism in the aspect of religion.

Coming to the OT literature, absorption of Greek culture is evident in several books, especially in the Song of Songs. This book is a collection of love songs and marriage songs. In its present form the book seems to belong to third century BC, when the influence of Hellenistic culture was very strong in literature and art. When we compare these love poems with those of the pre-exilic times, we find that the Song of Songs is to a major part natural love songs with a lot of erotic elements in them. It is quite logical to conclude that the Hellenistic romances, which were very erotic have influenced the composition of the book. This is true also regarding some stories in the Bible. When we examine the stories of Ruth, Job and Susanna and compare them with the stories of Esther, Judith and Tobit, we see that only the latter ones contain erotic elements. Since these books came from the Hellenistic period, it is most probable that the erotic features were absorbed from the Greek romances.

Many Hellenistic elements are found also in the book of Wisdom. Attributed to Solomon, the book of Wisdom was most probably written originally in Greek by an anonymous Jewish author (authors!) with a Greek education in Alexandria who had been strongly influenced by Greek philosophy and Hellenistic culture. Written some time after the second century BC, the book of Wisdom could be considered "the first attempt to combine the insights of Greek philosophy... with the truths of Jewish faith".[27] It is neither easy nor needed now, to bring out all the Hellenistic elements in the book since it is a thoroughly hellenized work. It is sufficient to quote the words of Silvia Schroer: "With the figure of the personified wisdom, Sophia, the authors not only give a new significance to a female image of God from the post-exilic period, but at the same time implicitly proclaim a program of inculturation... As architect or builder of all things she instructs the wise in all the scientific disciplines of Hellenism".[28]

27   Allen C. Myears, 1060.

28   Silvia Schroer, "Transformations of Faith. Documents of Intercultural Learning in the Bible", *Concilium* (1994.2) 8.

Conclusion

Though the OT is primarily the story of the People of God, it is also a document of inter-cultural learning. As we saw in the foregoing study this is especially true regarding the exilic and post-exilic periods where the Israelites encountered the famous cultures of the ancient Near East, the Babylonian, the Persian and the Hellenistic. However, everything that happened during this time should be seen as per the plan and providential care of the Almighty to give an adequate formation to His People through a process of giving and receiving, discerning and responding. As M. Amaladoss has indicated, the series of interventions of God in human history documented for us in the Bible is only indicative of a larger pattern that appears in God's relationship to the human and his care for all the peoples of the world.[29]

Let us conclude this study with the following thoughts about inter-culturation based on the first chapter of the book of Daniel.[30] The book of Daniel gives an account of the life and apocalyptic visions of Daniel who was a noble Israelite taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar and later appointed in the royal service of the king. The first chapter of Daniel tells of four young men who were transported to a culture other than their own by a conquering nation. Daniel, of courcse, is the central figure among the four. Several facets of this chapter should be noted. *First,* the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, chose Daniel and his friends to serve in his court. They were chosen because they were "youths without blemish, handsome and skilful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning and competent to serve in the king's palace" (v.4). *Second,* they were taught "the literature and language of the Chaldeans" (v.4). *Third,* Daniel decided that he would not defile himself with the food and drink of the Babylonians (v.8). *Fourth,* "God gave Daniel favour and compassion" with his superiors even though he and his friends would not partake of the food (v.9-16). *Fifth,* "God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom" (v.17). *Sixth,* the king found Daniel and his friends to be "ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his

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29   M. Amaladoss, "Inculturation: Theological Perspectives," *Jeevadhara,* 6 (1976) 297.

30   These thoughts are mainly based on the article, Jerry Solomon, "Culture and the Bible", *Probe Ministries* (Richardson, Texas, 1996).

kingdom" (v.20). *Seventh,* "Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus" (v.21).

This synopsis provides us with several important observations. First, evidently there was no attempt on the part of Daniel and his friends to totally separate themselves from the culture, in particular the educational system of that culture. This was a typical response among the ancient Jews. These young men were capable of interacting with an ungodly culture without being contaminated by it. Perhaps a lesson can be learned from Daniel concerning a proper response to other cultures. Of course such a response should be based on wisdom and discernment. That leads us to our second observation. Even though Daniel and his companions learned from the culture, they did so by practicing discernment. They obviously compared what they learned of Babylonian thought with what they already understood from God's point of view. The Law of God was something with which they were well acquainted and which they held to their hearts. Edward Young's comments on v.17 clarify this: "The knowledge and intelligence which God gave to them... was of a discerning kind, that they might know and possess the ability to accept what was true and to reject what was false in their instruction".[31] Such perception is greatly needed when one is in an inter-cultural environment. A separatist, isolationist mentality creates moral and spiritual vacuums throughout our culture. We should replace those vacuums with relevant ideas and values that are spawned in the minds of God-fearing thinkers and doers though they belong to another culture or religion. Third, God approved of their condition within the culture and even gave them what was needed to influence it (v. 17).

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31   Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949) 48-49.

Interculturation in the Gospels

Augustine Mulloor

This contribution is an attempt to show how Jesus lived in a world of interculturation and resistance to the same. Jesus being a trans-cultural person promoted intercultutration in his teaching and praxis. This is the primary model for Christians challenged to be intercultural.

Introduction

Geographically the small country of Palestine was a bridge between East and West, the point of crossing between great mountain ranges and vast deserts, the two gigantic barriers between east and west[1]. This piece of land was serving as the medium of interculturation. The culture of this land was naturally very much affected, influenced and penetrated by the cultural movements from east and west. The Palestinian culture was an interculturated reality.

Into this society of Palestine came Jesus in the first century uninfluenced by the trends of that time led by the determination of social, religious and political frontiers and borderlines that hampered the process of interculturation[2]. Jesus was a person of intercultural vision and through his teaching and action Jesus set a trend and gave a pattern for the emergence of a global culture. Jesus did not blindly identify himself with any of the existing cultural trends but being deeply aware of them

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1.   Cfr. Denis, *Basic biblical geography*, Philadelphia, 1987, P-7.; O.Keel, "from the midst of the nations": The Bible as a gateway to ancient near eastern cultures", in: *Concilium* (1955) 3-13.

2.   A. Mulloor (Ed.) "Universaliam: Biblical challenges", *Jeevadhara*, XXX/176, Kottayam, 2000; FABC, *Jesus for our times,* Manila.

transcended all of them while the prime principle of receiving from and giving to is kept alive[3]. In this study we shall examine the context and the way interculturation happened through the person and mission of Jesus, sometimes through very conscious provocative and prophetic decisions and actions, and other times through automatic natural influence, penetration and assimilation[4]. We presuppose that interculturation is a normal process of growth and that Bible itself is a cultural heritage from this point of view[5].

1. Palestine of Jesus' Time : an Interculturated World

The culture of Palestine at the time of Jesus was not a monolythic culture but the result of interaction between jewish culture and the cultures of various dominating political powers like Greece, Persia and Rome. Being under the colonial lords of Rome the interculturation process was still on during Jesus' ministry, on the one side forcibly through the decisions of the colonial lords and on the other side spontaneously and automatically through mutual presence. The forced influence of Romans on the Palestinian people is seen especially in the mode of taxation through which the riches of the country were exploitatively transported to Rome[6]. The domination which was primarily political had its effects on all the other levels too, including the religious one. The Roman governor or the procurator of Judea nominated the high priest, the head of the supreme council of the Jews[7]. Roman rule had its effect even on the big landowners and the aristicratic class having the power to dispossess people of their property rights[8]. The jewish intermediaries were appointed

3.   Cfr. F. Wilfred et al. (Eds.) "Frontier violations", *Concilium*, London, 1992.

4.   A few important contributions regarding Bible and culture are the following: W. Beuken et al. (Eds.), Bible as cultural heritage; M.A. Cox, "Inculturation and Bible", in: *East Asian Pastoral Review,* 30 (1993) 202-217; T. Menamparambil, *The challenge of cultures. Cross cultural relationship, conflicts, Inculturation,* Bombay, 1996; G. Soares-Prabhu, "The New Testament as a model of inculturation", in: *Jeevadhara* 33 (1976) 268-282; L. Legrand, *The Bible on culture,* Bangalore, 2001; R. Hardawiryana, *Building the church in pluricultural Asia,* Rome 1986.

5.   Cfr. W. Beuken et al. (Eds.), "The Bible as cultural heritage", *Concilium,* London, 1995.

6.   FABC, *Jesus for Today,* p. 7

7.   Ibid.,   8.   Ibid.

by the Romans from the elders and great families and publicans were appointed from the lower levels of society. All these contributed to forced or spontaneous interculturation.

This process is identifiable also intra-socially between various stratas of the society. While a wide gap existed between rural and urban regions interactions were inevitable. The interculturation in the urban areas were facilitated by artisans, labourers especially in construction, big merchants or small merchants. The products like textiles, food, perfumes and jewellery were important for pilgrims. The merchants mediated the link between Palestine and big empires through trade and business[9]. Between Rome and the Palestinian society the interactions were made officially possible because the high priest was appointed by the roman procurator. The members of administration were chosen from the aristocratic group, just as the tax-collecting publicans were appointed by them[10].

Within the society there was interaction between different stratas of persons, priestly aristicracy, lower middle class of artisans, tradesmen, ordinary officials and the lower ones.

Geographically the province of Galilee contained cultivating lands and hence mostly farmers and artisans were living there. Besides, there were a lot of gentiles living there; mixing between both was so common to the extent that these jews were being branded as impure and outcasts and hence untouchables.

These interactions between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural jews and gentiles naturally allowed a kind of interculturation.

2. Palestine of Jesus' Time: a World Resisting Interculturation

Israelites were too conscious of their being chosen by God and hence they would separate themselves from others. As a result there was a strong stream within the society that resisted any outer influence and considered any external cultural intervention as alienating experience. Besides, the same attitude reigned within the community itself on account

9.   Ibid. pp. 8-9.

10.   Ibid p. 12; cfr. D. Tidball, *An introduction to the sociology of the New Testament,* Exeter, 1983; G. Theissen, *Social reality and the early christians,* Edinburgh, 1992; H.C. Kee et al., *The living world of the New Testament,* London 1983; Daniel Rops, *La vita quotidiana in Palestina al tempo di Gesù,* Milano, 1986.

of the compartmentalization and stratification on the basis of purity laws and caste considerations. The various sects and groups may represent these attitudes: pharisees, sadducees, zealots, tax collectors, the handicapped, the lepers, samaritans, galileans etc.[11]

The sadducees being very conservative resisted any external influence like that of hellenism or of the Romans. That is why they could not accept the resurrection of the dead which teaching came to judaism through the influence of hellenism. Whereas the pharisees being more open in this regard accepted this as part of their belief. The zealots were fanatically opposed to Romans and resisted all possible influence through violence and thus closing the door of interculturation. Within the community too the interactions were blocked by the open discriminatory attitudes towards the lepers, tax collectors, the blind and the lame etc. They were isolated, separated from the society without any possibilities for social interaction and communication on the active level, condemned to live on the margins of the society with no possibility to participate in the movements of the main stream[12].

3. Jesus, a trans-cultural person

Jesus was a jew, but more than a jew. Racially his nature was jewish but really his nature was beyond jewishness. All the Gospels relate the rootedness of Jesus in the jewish culture and all of them present Jesus as a transcultural person.

For Mark the moment of the death of Jesus is the time of the revelation of the universal imprint of his personality, recognized not by a jew but

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11.   Cfr. E. Schürer, *The history of jewish people in the age of Jesus Christ,* Vol. II, Edinburgh, 1979 ; A. J. Saldharini, *Pharisees, scribes and sadducees in Palestinian society,* Edinburgh, 1989; J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Companions and competitors,* Vol. III, London, 2001.

12.   Cfr. G. Soares-Prabhu, "The kingdom of God: "Jesus' vision of a new Society", in : D.S. Amalorpavadass (Ed.) *The Indian church in the struggle for a new society,* Bangalore, 1981, 579-608; "Good News to the poor: The social implications of the message of Jesus", in : *ibid,* 609-626; "The class in the Bible: The biblical poor a social class?", in : *Vidyajyoti,* XLIX/7 (1985), 322-346; "The miracles of Jesus: The subversion of a power structure?", in: S. Kappen (Ed.) *Jesus Today,* Madras, 1985 21-29; "Jesus and social justice", in : FABC, *Jesus for our times,* 34- 52; "Jesus and the poor", in : J. Muricken (Ed.) *Poverty in India. Challenges and responses,* Trivandrum, 1988, 259 - 290; K. C. Abraham, "The Bible and the poor", in: *ibid.,* 291-306.

by an outsider, a centurion. The confession he makes, namely, "this man was indeed the Son of God" (Mk 15:39) seems to use the language of roman imperial cult very much familiar to the confessor, centurion. Is not this an inter-cultural expression?[13].

Matthew begins the Gospel with the title sentence: "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1). The second title - son of Abraham" based on Gen 12 and 15 points to the trans-cultural and universal dimension of the person of Jesus. According to Matthew the interculturation is part of the history of Israel and he establishes this view by bringing four women into the genealogy of Jesus. The presence of these gentile women in the history of the growth of David's family shows how God has let the interculturation happen in his strange ways through the process of receiving from and giving to each other[14]. The Matthean theological vision of the widening of the mission from the restricted Israelite borderlines to the universal mission open to "all nation" (Mt. 10:5f; 15:21-28; 28:16-20) is an evidence of the aperture to interculturation[15].

According to Luke the mission of Jesus has by its very nature universalistic seal[16]. This, the evangelist reveals through the emphasis laid on the inclusive attitude of Jesus in the ministry, embracing all various groups and sects we have mentioned above, both insiders and outsiders[17]. The foreshadowing of this is found already in the infancy narratives especially through the genealogy which is brought down to Adam, the first man (Lk 3:23-38). Lukan Jesus is a transcultural person.

Johannine Jesus is presented as the 'logos' of the Father (Jn 1:1-18). The language is clearly greek, philosophical. The influence of hellenism on Israel is a fact from 4th century BCE. This was continued through later periods. While stark resistance to hellenization existed from a group,

13. Cfr. Tue Hun Kim, "The anarthrous *hyios theou* in Mk 15:39 and the Roman imperial cult", in: *Biblica,* 79/2 (1998), 221 - 241.

14. Cfr. U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus,* I . 1, Zürich, 1985, 88-98; W. D. Davies, D. C. Allison Jr., *The Gospel according to St. Matthew,* Vol. 1, Edinburgh, 1988, 161-190.

15. Cfr. W. Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthäus-evangeliums,* Munchen, 1964.

16. Cfr. A. Mulloor, "From east and west, from north and south, Lukan view of universalism", in : *Jeevadhara,* XXX/176, 177-189.

17. Cfr. ibid.; J. Navone, *The themes of St. Luke,* Rome.

the automatic and unconscious influence could not be resisted by any one. Thus the hellenistic language was used as a vehicle for carrying a content that is typically jewish, sapiential and Old Testament[18]. It is a sign of inter-penetration of cultures. The same principle is pertinent to understand the vocabulary of "knowledge" used by John to articulate the relationship between Father and Son and between Son and the disciples, like shepherd and the sheep (Jn 10:14-15). The language belongs to greek culture, but the content is essentially jewish and Old Testament[19]. Although dependence is not possible, the similarities cannot be denied between John and the texts from the history of religions regarding the image of Jesus their revealer[20].

So a rereading of the intercultural process will bring to light that Jesus was a transcultural person. He could not be reduced to the traditional categories of jewish rabbi, apocalyptic prophet, a revolutionary, a royal messiah, prophet, doer of extra-ordinary deeds, teacher, eschatological agent, God's son, son of man[21]. In him many cultures meet, through him many cultures find the vehicle of assimilation and identification and in him a global culture of communion is exemplified.

4. Interculturation in the intra-jewish society
in the teaching and life of Jesus

Jesus' association with the jews did not restrict itself to particular groups but was open to all the various groups, sects and stratas of the society from top to bottom. In the context of the society that was stratitfied almost clearly on the basis of discriminatory religious considerations like purity and impurity, religiosity and irreligiosity, knowledge of law and tradition and ignorance, the rich and the poor, the

18.   Cfr. R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to John,* Vol. 1, London, 1971, Introduction, ch.7. Spiritual setting and origin, M.J. Taylor (Ed.), *A companion to John,* New York, 1977, 33-59.

19.   Cfr. A Mulloor, *Jesus' Prayer of Praise,* Delhi, 1996, 106 -112; 164-167; 1. De la Potterie, Studi di christologia Giovannea, Genova, 1986, 303-315.

20.   Today on the level of scholarship there is almost a consensus that the similarities can not be the basis for dependence, Jesus the revealer presented by John is the incarnate Son of God, the historical Jesus. And it is through faith in Jesus that one experiences salvation, i.e. communion with Father.

21.   F. Lentzen-Deis, "Jesus: Rabbi or revolutionary. The image of Jesus in the recent biblical research", in: *Images of Jesus* (F. Lentzen-Deis, Gen. Editor), Bombay, 1989, 26-82; J.D.G. Dünn, *Jesus Remembered,* vol. 1, Cambridge, 2003, 615=761.

outcasts and the superior class, men and women and companions and competitors. Through such an association Jesus promoted a counter culture beyond the divisional and discriminatory ones.

Jesus can call a tax collector to be his disciple just as the fishermen (Lk 5:1-11; 27-28); he can eat with tax collectors and sinners (Lk 5:29-32) taking the risk of practising radical table fellowship[22]; Jesus can teach that the tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners are qualified to be in the kingdom of God when they repent accepting God's revelation (Mt 21:31-32); Jesus does not hesitate to accept the invitation of a pharisee for a meal in his house (Lk 7:36-50); he can very generously accept the presence of a 'sinful' woman at the meal in the house of the host pharisee and feel quite at home with her, while the pharisee and his companions cannot tolerate the same (Lk 7:36-50); Jesus the guest can address himself to the pharisee his host without any consideration for human respect and without any fear and can make it clear to him that woman has behaved like host and that he has really failed to be one and that he has to learn from the woman concerning the values for a new culture[23]. Thus Jesus is able to mediate the interculturation process leading to openness which makes receiving and giving possible between two tightly compartmentalized and walled up groups. When Jesus encounters the leper (Mk 1:40-45) accepting him like any other jew without any prejudice and bias, violating the tradition of the ritual purity by touching him, he is initiating a new culture by seeing him, listening to him, feeling compassion for him, speaking to him and touching him, all from a totally new perspective of the heart and transcending the frontiers of the law and tradition. In the parable of the richman and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) Jesus introduces the eschatological necessity to open oneself to interculturation between the rich and the poor. The rich have to take the poor into consideration as expression of authentic faith life. What was lacking from the part of the rich man was real communication with the situation around him especially, the presence of Lazarus[24]. Authentic communication is the means for authentic interculturation.

22. Cfr. J.D. Crossan, *Jesus. A revolutionary Biography,* San Francisco, 1994, 67-68; F. Lentzen - Deis (Gen Ed.) *The images of Jesus,* Bombay, 1989, 54-82; G. Soares Prabhu, "The table fellowship of Jesus. Its significance for Dalit christians in India today", in: *Jeevadhara,* XX11/128, (1992)140-159.

23. Cfr. J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke,* vol.1, New York, 1979, 683- 694.

24. Cfr. F. Lentzen-Deis (Gen. Ed.) A. Mulloor (Ind. Ed.), *Jesus in the exegetical*

The same problem is dealt with in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32), in which the basic snag for the familial communion is the lack of proper communication between Father and the sons and between sons both before the division of the property and after the return of the younger one[25]. The context of Lk 15, namely, the accusation against Jesus from the part of the scribes and pharisees concerning his association with the sinners and tax collectors itself is an example of Jesus' option for facilitating the interaction between the apparently religious and the branded irreligious groups, Jesus wants the pretentions religious persons to enter into dialogue with the other instead standing outside, refusing to share and to receive.

When Jesus includes women into the group of disciples (Lk 8:1-4) associating himslef with them without any discrimination, he underscored the need for interaction between male and female. This is exemplified in the attitude of Jesus to the woman caught in adultery (Jn 7:53-8,11), his behaviour and teaching in the house of Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42), the positive attitude of Jesus to the woman who anointed him (Mk 14:3-9) and in Jesus' favourable attitude to the woman who was since several years bent down (Lk 13:10-17), to the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-17), and to the woman with the flow of blood (Lk 8:43-48). Jesus wants the formation of a new culture in which men and women can inclusively and dialogically interact with each other and help each other Jesus proclaims and affirms the dignity of women equal to anyone else in the society.

5. Interculturation in the Teaching and Mission of Jesus regarding the extra-jewish circles

There are not many texts in the gospels that speak about Jesus' attitude to the gentiles in whom we may include also the samaritans although they have already a relationship to the jewish culture[26]. But the few texts that we have, are clear signals of the project of Jesus concerning the interculturation with the extra- jewish circles of the society of that time.

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        reflections and community experience, Delhi, 1997, 37-88.

25.   Ibid.

26.   Cfr. A. Mulloor (Ed.), *Faith, Culture, India Today. Perspectives,* Kalamassery, 1991, 117.

The events connected with the relationship of Jesus to the gentiles are all healing narrations. The gentiles come to Jesus in the context of their suffering. Jesus' behaviour implies always the appreciation for what is good in them, correction regarding what is lacking in them, thus always creating the path way for giving and receiving.

Jesus' encounter with the centurion of Capernaum (Mt 8:5-13) implies that there exist already a kind of interaction between Jews and Romans. The jewish elders happily recommended him to Jesus and Jesus willingly decides to go to his house, ignoring the religious tradition of purity. The centurion also respects Jesus very much. Jesus' attitude promotes mutual acceptance and the readiness to help without demanding radical change in each other's status and tradition.

Jesus' action at Gerasa (Mk 5:1-21) is yet another model. Just as Jesus is willing to help the man possessed by the demons to be free from the enslaved situation, he is ready to leave the place as demanded by the people. Jesus does not demand anything from them like becoming his disciples etc.

Jesus' attitude to the syro-phoenician woman, in Matthew called a canaanite woman (Mk 7:24-30; Mt15:21-28) is paradigmatic of Jesus' promotion of the interculturation between Jews and gentiles. Jesus appreciates her faith as extra-ordinary and exemplary in relation to the Israelites. Qualitatively she is considered better insider than an apparent insider, i.e, a jew. Jesus thus transcends the reservations of jewish casuistic tradition of laws and regulations.

Jesus gave a very special place to the samaritans in his ministry. They were presented as models and examples of the values Jesus wanted to promote (Lk 10:23-37; 17:11-19). The story of the encounter between Jesus and the samaritan woman in Jn 4:1-42 is the best type of the interculturation process. In fact it is dialogue of interculturation, involving the cultural, religious, social and psychological factors. That Jesus took the risk of extering into a dialogue with a person who is source of impurity and lead her to authentic faith led by the value of singleness of heart on the basis of singleness of God is a sign of successful interculturation[27].

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27.   Ibid. pp. 136 -137.

Jesus was open to all, without any consideration whether one is a jew or gentile or samaritan. Jesus' attitude to his opponents and competitors was one of great sensitivity and respect. Those who questioned him were dealt with human openness and generosity. The humanness and compassion was shown to all in need. He was respectful to all. He paid special and personal attention to differences in culture but acknowledged, preserved and promoted what is good in all.

Conclusion

We were trying to identify some of the streams of interculturation in the context of the life and mission of Jesus, as presented in the gospels. First of all, Jesus came to an interculturated Palestine. At the same time there were forces in that society that resisted starkly the process of interculturation both within between various groups and stratas and with the outside circles. Jesus was a transcultural person. Jesus style of life and approach in his mission always promoted and supported the interculturation, first of all, in the intra-jewish circles, between various self-enclosed and independent groups and sects. Jesus' relationship with the gentiles and samaritans was the best example of interculturation on a wider and universal level. Hence interculturation belongs to the very essential aspect of Jesus' person and mission. If so, the christianness consists in being open to interculturation which will go on unlimitedly.

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Models of Inter-culturation
in the Early Christian Period

Jacob Prasad

This is a study on the inter-culturation in the biblical tradition after the time of Jesus. The author concentrates mainly on the Pauline models of inter-culturation and finally makes references to Johannine and Petrine writings.

Introduction

Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1), the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, for Jew first and then Greek (Rom 1:16), was born in the land of Palestine, hence in a Jewish culture. After the Christ event, the Gospel started meeting the Greeks, the Nations, who had a different culture. The encounter of the Gospel with different cultures paved the way for the inter-culturation of the Gospel. It could not any more have its background set only in the monolithic Jewish culture. If the power of the Gospel were to penetrate the cultures of the Nations, the proclaimers of the Gospel had to adopt strategies, which were to be necessarily different from the one adopted when confronting a Palestinian Jewish community. It was in dialogue with the cultures and religions of the Nations that the Gospel took its root in the Greco-Roman world. The process was one of giving and taking, rejecting, adapting and re-interpreting. Inter-culturation then was the Bible's way of dealing with other cultures and religions. The study of such paradigmatic praxis should help us today to dialogue with the cultures and nations in our attempt to proclaim the Gospel.

This article will deal with the inter-culturation in the early Christian period after the time Jesus. We should therefore start with the time of St. Paul, that is, from the writing of the first letter to Thesselonians, the first document of the New Testament, written in AD 50/51[1], and end with the time of the Second letter of Peter, the last of the documents of the New Testament, supposed to be written in around 100 A.D.[2] Hence the span is that of about 50 years. We do not wish to enter into the apostolic and post apostolic fathers, as that would serve as matter for another study. We shall see how some of the New Testament authors engaged in dialogue with new cultures as they started their missionary endeavour.

1. Paul the Pioneer

Everyone will agree to the suggestion that after Jesus, Paul and John are the two main representatives of the early Church. The writings of Luke and the Catholic epistles are also not without a certain degree of importance in this regard. We will therefore deal at first with the genuine letters of Paul and then proceed to John and others.

Although Paul is not the only one who announced the Gospel to the non-Jews his contribution to our study has great importance for it was Paul himself who had developed a global and systematic vision about missionary activity and its consequences. At the same time we should not be thinking that Paul treats directly the question that we are interested in. We do not find immediately in Paul an approach or judgment on religions and cultures. However we can draw out a number of indications

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1   It is doubtlessly accepted today that 1 Thess is the oldest preserved Christian document and that it represents Paul's earliest extant correspondence, written in 50 or 51 AD. See E. J Richard, *First and Second Thesselonians* (Sacra Pagina 11; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995) 1.4.

2.   The established scholarly view today is that 2 Peter is the latest book of the New Testament. J. H. Neyrey, "The Second Letter of Peter", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R.E. Brown - J.A. Fitzmyer _ R.E. Murphy) London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991) 1018, puts the date as around AD 100, as 2 Pet closely resembles the argument of Plutarch's *De sera numinis vindicta,* dated A.D 96. R. E Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997) 762, would put it as late as 130 AD.

from him as Paul himself is a convert and as he had been sent to the Nations.

When we approach Paul, it has to be born in mind that today scholars make a distinction between the undisputed and disputed letters of Paul. While 1 Thess, Gal, Rom, 1 & 2 Cor, Phil and Phlm are considered undisputed, 2 Thess, Eph and Col are disputed, and the Pastorals, 1 & 2 Tim and Tim, are considered definitively deutero- Pauline[3]. Paul's conversion must have been between A.D. 30 and 39, and his death, if it had happened during the persecution of Nero, must have been between 64 and 68 A.D[4]. In the undisputed letters we see that Paul's life of being a convert has much to do with his self-identity and proclamation of the Gospel to the Nations with different cultures.

1.1. *Paul's Personal Background*

Paul was a Jew belonging to the group of Pharisees (Phil 3:5), strictest group of the Jewish people, known as the *perushim,* "the pure ones", attached to the Law and to the institution of the synagogue. As Israel in general did, they did not look at the Pagans (Gentiles) with a good eye, and would not live well with them. The Gentiles were even termed as "dogs", meaning ritually unclean and thus outside the covenant (cf. Matt 7:6; 15:26-27).[5] The Jews and the Gentiles were two worlds closed to each other. The only opening was that of proselytism, which was in away limited to the level of personal contacts. Now Paul is a convert from Judaism of the strictest kind. He did not at the same time abandon the Jewish religion to accommodate himself to a Hellenistic culture or to live in a Greco-Roman way. But he was a person trained both in Judaism and Hellenism and he knew very well Hebrew and Greek, as is evident from his letters. In fact after his conversion to Christian faith he

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3. Cf. R. E Brown, "Canonicity", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed R.E. Brown - J.A. Fitzmyer - R.E. Murphy) (London : Geoffrey Chapman, 1991) 1044-1045.

4. Cf. J.A. Fitzmyer, "Paul". *The New Jerome Bibical Commentary* (ed. R.E. Brown - J. A. Fitzmyer - R.E. Murphy) (London : Geoffery Chapman, 1991) 1333-1337.

5. Cf. O. Michel, "Kuōn", *TDNT* III, 1101-1104, P.T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1991) 355.

did in a way transpose his cultural accent from the Jewish to Greek. He could have, for example, become another Philo. That did not happen.[6]

Paul's conversion from Judaism signifies that he understood the inadequacy of the Jewish religion not just for him alone but for everybody. If asked which were the points in which he could not any more stand with Judaism one of them would be that of Judaism's appraisal of the Gentiles. Paul himself narrates the story of his conversion and vacation in Gal 1:13-17. Here Paul insists on two things: his finding of Jesus and the attitude towards the Gentiles. In Gal 1:15-16 as Paul uses Old Testament terminology of the vocation of Jeremiah (1:5) and of the Servant of YHWH of Isaiah (49:1), to present his own vocation he does not negate his previous religious experience; but all that is now directed towards the Gentiles. It is important to note that "Christ" and "the Gentiles", are bound together right from the very first moment of the experience of Paul. Consequently he always presents his vocation in relation to the Gentiles. He has understood the fact that God has freely decided to give, not only to him, but also to everybody in the world the gift of salvation. We find this clearly expressed in the letter to Romans: "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one" (Rom 3:29-30). From this perspective, for Paul, in his apostolic work and in the theorizing that he will do, the formulation, "Christ" and "the Gentiles", will remain fundamental.[7] Hence Paul is able to draw water from the wells of the riches of the Gentiles too.

1.2 *Pauls' rationale for Inter-culturation, and the ways he adopted*

The fact that Pauls' conversion set in motion a different orientation in his life and thought pattern can still further be appreciated by a look into certain parts of the letter to Galatians. In this the central section will be Gal 2:15-21; it is the nucleus of the teaching of Paul in Galatians; the words here are a careful exposition of the truth of the Gospel.[8] This

6.   Cf. E. Farahian, *Bibbia e Religioni*. Problematica - Capitoli scelti.II Nuovo Testamento (dispense ad uso degli studenti; Roma: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregriana, 1992 -1993) 36.

7.   Cf. Farahian, *Bibbia e Religioni,* 37-40.

8.   Cf. F. J. Matera, *Galatians* (Sacra Pagina 9; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 97-98.

comes following the episode of Paul accusing Peter of inconsistency, which represents the conflict over purity and impurity with regard to dietary prescriptions of the Mosaic law. This leads Paul to deeper reflection, which is there in vv. 15-21.

What Paul wants to say in 15-21 is that the works of the Law are from the part of the human and these cannot determine the justification of the human, that is, these works cannot create the right relation to God. In other words, one cannot at the same time believe in Jesus and be clinging to the practices of Judaism. The faith in Christ makes the demands of the Jewish religion invalid. All these, as a consequence, led Paul to an opening towards the Gentiles.[9] This has its repercussions in the anthropological level and Paul enunciates it in Gal 3:26-29. Paul posits Christ as the principle of unity of the human kind and therefore draws the equality of all humans. In an age like ours in which the cultural differences and their incommunicability are very much emphasised, Paul gives us a good lesson. This assertion of faith that the human kind is one and is one in Christ has aftermaths by way of cultures. There are no iron curtains between cultures; all the significations are communicable among all. What is required is faithful and adequate translation.[10] In this passage, Paul therefore, draws the unity and equality of all men and women from three perspectives.

1.2.1. *There is no longer Jew or Greek*

The first consequence of being in Christ is in the religious level. The religious distinction between Jews and Gentiles does not subsist after the coming of Jesus Christ: all are children of God (v.26). The adoptive childrenhood, supposed to be a privilege of Israel, received from God (Rom 9:4; Gal 4:5), is now extended to everyone, and is not derived from circumcision but through faith in Christ.[11]

We may note here the metaphor that Paul uses: "As many as you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (literally, 'put on [*endusasthe*] Christ')" (v.27). Although it may be argued that Paul is making use of the Old Testament expression for adoption of another's moral disposition or outlook (Job 29:14; 2 Chr 6:41), the idea

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9   Cf. Farahian, *Bibbia e Religioni,* 43-44.

10   Cf. Farahian, *Bibbia e Religioni,* 43-45.

11   Cf. Farahian, *Bibbia e Religioni,* 43-46.

cannot be easily dismissed that Paul borrows a figure from Greek mystery religions, in which the initiate identified himself with the god by donning his robes.[12] In a situation in which no religion or faith is looked at with suspicion, then there emerges the possibility of inter-culturation.

1.2.2 *There is no longer slave or free*

The second consequence is related to the order in the society. No one can be, by birth or for historical reasons, judged as always inferior or as being subject to another. We can see here a reflection of the sapiential tradition of Israel which would say that the son who is growing at his turn will become a father, and the disciple learning will become a master. More than that, the individual will grow up to be a person and so has to be respected as such. If there are no differences among humans before God, among themselves there is no reason for such differences. All have the same dignity and are equals essentially. The differences, whether political or economical, are all relative, and have no ontological reasons to exist. Although Paul did not directly fight against slavery, such a view of his did undermine the system.[13]

In the perspective of inter-culturation Paul's treatment of the question of slavery in Philemon requires more attention. In fact the Bible is a model of interaction between human thinking and the divine word, an originating and original paradigm for inter-culturation.[14] Here, as there is the aspect of give and take, the aspect of correction and development of thought too happen in the light of the divine word. One of the models in which these aspects are verified is the Bible's treatment of slavery. Paul's reflections in this regard may be considered as standing at the very end of a long evolutionary development of thought. The point of departure in this regard is the situation as it was in the Ancient West Asia. Slavery was regarded as an acceptable practice in those cultures. But the Bible contains elements, which will surpass the idea of slavery.

The first text is seen in the very first pages of the Bible, in the beautiful narration of creation. Reporting the creation of the human

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12   Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R.E. Brown - J. A. Fitzmyer - R. E. Murphy) (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991) 787.

13   Cf. Farahian, *Bibbia e Religioni,* 46.

14   A. Spreafico, "La Bibbia, modello e sfida di inculturazione", *Euntes Docete,* 52 (1999) 13-21, esp. 14.

kind Gen 1:26-27, says, "God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them". Men and women are created in the image and likeness of God. The text introduces a principle of equality, and that is also based on a relationship with God. If we think of this in the background of the surrounding cultures, the thought is fully an unexpected one. There is absolutely no talk of slavery or of one being inferior to another. This text therefore goes against any kind of theological ground for slavery. The Bible has surpassed the surrounding cultures in this regard, which means that the Bible is in dialogue with the surrounding cultures. The attention given to slaves in both the redactions of the Decalogue (Exod 20 and Deut 5) in the context of the Sabbath is also to be taken into consideration. Deut 5:12-14 reads, "Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you." The slave thus has the right to participate in the rest of the master on the day of Sabbath. It is a motivation coming from faith, for the Sabbath introduces a principle of humanity and solidarity with respect to the slave. The clause, "so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you" (v. 14) affirms a principle of equality between the slave and the master on the day of the Lord.[15]

A significant text in the same vein is Paul's letter to Philemon. Pauline letters of course witness to the fact that Paul accepted the fact of slavery. Yet the Christian faith induces Paul to introduce a principle which will overrun slavery, when he sends back the slave Onesimus to Philemon. The pertinent verses are 15-16: "Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man[16] and in the Lord." It seems that Paul is

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15 Cf. Spreafico, "La Bibbia, modello e sfida di inculturazione", 16-17.

16 This rendering is as in the *New American Bible*. The phrase "as a man" is given as "in the flesh" in the *New Revised Standard Version*, a literal translation of *en sarki*. The Italian version of *CEI* has it as "sia come *uomo*", and the *German*

underscoring an element of equality between the master and the slave, when he requests Philemon to accept Onesimus as a "man". But this was not the common feeling at that time. If we compare the two letters written by Pliny the Younger (A.D. 61-112) to his friend Sabinianus about re-accepting a slave who had run away the difference is quite obvious.[17] Pliny pleads with his friend to be patient and lenient to the slave and re-accept him. Paul, even as he complies with the Roman law that a runaway slave must be sent back to his master (v. 12),[18] asks Philemon to transform his relationship with the slave.[19] Thus the faith in Christ, introducing the principle of equality, serves to transform the cultural milieu.

The author of the letter to Colossians, standing in the tradition of Paul, has also a view relating to slaves, quite different from what is expected generally. Col 3:23-24 is quite suggestive: "[Slaves], whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the *inheritance* as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ."[20] Even the slave receives "inheritance" in this understanding, while that is a privilege only of sons and daughters normally.

1.2.3. *There is no longer male or female*

Paul's reflection on the consequences of being in Christ could have been terminated with the aspect of slavery and freedom. But Paul goes further and says that there is no more discrimination on the basis of sex; no superiority ought to be assumed by one sex over the other. Both the sexes have the same dignity. The sexual differences are there, but they become secondary. Even in this matter, Paul goes higher in the

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Einheitsübersetzung as "als Mensch." What is understood by *en sarki* in the phrase *kai en sarki kai en kuriō* must be "as a man." J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon* (AB 34C; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000) 115-116, renders the whole phrase as "both as human being and in the Lord." Fitzmyer rightly observes that *sarx* here refers to Onesimus' ordinary condition as a man or a human being of this world, connoting his social and moral status and not kinship.

17   See these two letters in Fitzmyer, *Philemon,* 21-22.

18   Cf. Fitzmyer, *Philemon,* 26-29 for the Roman law relating to runaway slaves.

19   Cf. Spreafico, "La Bibbia, modello e sfida di inculturazione," 17.

20   Emphasis added.

aspect of culture, as it was a culture, which did not give sufficient space to women.

1.3 *The Pauline Christology and soteriology*

As seen above, Pauls' reflection of the sort on different cultures and religions is based on his understanding of Christology and therefore of soteriology. Paul understands Jesus Christ as the person in whom God's plan of salvation and his love for humankind have been accomplished in its fullness. Only in this perspective theological thinking of an open type can be formulated embracing all cultures and religions. This is seen in yet another author, the author of the letter to Ephesians, considered as the best disciple and supreme interpreter of Paul. In Eph 2:11-22, the author applies the Pauline principle to realise the unity of the humankind. That wall of separation and enmity between the two groups, Jews and Gentiles, and for that matter between any groups, can be overcome and broken (v. 14) only by virtue of the work of Christ, for it is in him there is the possibility of reconciliation.[21]

2. The Johannine Model

John's Gospel must have been written around A.D. 90. In its approach and mode of presentation it is much different from the Synoptics. We will point to a few texts here indicating the Johannine model of inter-culturation. In this we have to begin with the purpose or scope of the Gospel, of which the author himself speaks towards the end of the Gospel, 20:30-31.

2.1. *John 20:30-31*

It is stated that the author in the composition of his Gospel has made a selection of sēmeia, signs, done by Jesus and has narrated them in order that the reader may acknowledge Jesus as the Christ (Messiah = the anointed one), the Son of God, and through that confession of faith receive the gift of eternal life. But to whom is this Gospel addressed? Or more exactly, to those who are already Christians or to those who are not yet Christians? This question is not easily solved, as it entails two textual traditions. The first, having the reading with the "sigma" in the verb, *hina pisteusēte* (aorist subjunctive), found in Codices Bezae and Alexandrinus, meaning "in order that you may come to believe", suggests

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21   Cf. Farahian, *Bibbia e Religioni*, 52.

that the Gospel was addressed to non-Christians; and therefore the scope was missionary. The second, having a reading without the "sigma" in the verb, *hina pisteuēte* (present subjunctive), found in Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, meaning, "in order that you may continue to believe", suggests that it was addressed to Christians; and therefore scope was catechetical. Although the majority of the exegetes today would uphold the second reading, it is difficult to ward off the first when we see John's dialogue with the Gentile culture and religion of his time, of which a few examples may be set forth here.

2.2. *The Logos Christology in the Prologue*

Matthew and Luke have two chapters each of the infancy narrative. But John does not report or narrate in the like manner. John sings of the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus. The prologue is the most beautiful of the incarnation hymns. John presents it in terms of the *Logos* (Word) becoming flesh. The exegetes try to see whence the evangelist drew the concept of *Logos,* whether from Greek Philosophy, Philo of Alexandria, or Jewish Wisdom Speculation. Although it is widely thought today that the source of the evangelist is not so much the Greek Philosophy as the Jewish tradition, still the influence of the former can only be hesitantly ruled out. *Logos* is the immanent divine spirit that pervades and orders the cosmos according to Stoic philosophy.[22] Although, of course, the Prologue's suggestion that the Word became flesh would have been unthinkable to the Greek mind, one cannot but think that the evangelist was purposefully making use of the Greek terminology too, in order to show that even the Hellenistic understanding of the *Logos* was either replaced or brought to its perfection in the fact of the Word becoming flesh. The evangelist's strategy of placing the Greeks at the end of the Book of signs, as wishing to Jesus would go in support of this argument. Notably, it is after the Pharisees have said, "The world has gone after him," John places the instance of the Greeks aspiring to see him.[23] Interestingly, the two disciples who serve as intermediaries have both Greek names, *Andreas* and

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22   Cf. P. Perkins, "The Gospel According to John", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R. E. Brown - J. A. Fitzmyer - R. E. Murphy) (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991) 944.

23   Cf. Farahian, *Bibbia e Religioni,* 82-84.

Philippos. Obviously the evangelist is in dialogue with the cultures of his time.

2.3 *The First Cana Miracle and the Dionysus' Cult*

Some exegetes have seen behind the miracle at the marriage feast in Cana the rituals enacted at the Dionysus' shrine, where the god Dionysus was said to be responsible for transforming water into wine. Some reject the idea on the basis that short of the substances transformed, there is nothing else in the Johannine story to suggest that the Dionysus cult was responsible for the attribution of such a miracle to Jesus.[24] Yet we cannot think that some of the Greco-Roman readers of the Gospel would not have associated Cana miracle and the Dionysus cult. What is surprising however is that the author of the Fourth Gospel was not afraid of such associations when the story of Jesus was narrated;[25] it had surely something more to say than what would come out of such associations and allusions, which means that it was in dialogue with the surrounding culture. Even when it may be argued that the author may not have associated the miracle with the Dionysus cult, in the early Church the celebration of the feast of the Epiphany did smack of this association. It was on the eve of the feast of Dionysus, that is in the night between 5 and 6 January that they kept in his temple three jars of water which would be turned into wine the next morning. And it was exactly on 6 January that the Greek Church celebrated the feast of Epiphany, in which the Gospel story of the feast of Cana was read. The Church saw in Jesus the fulfilment of the Dionysian earning for ecstacy, intoxication and transformation, for Jesus brings the fullness of life, he gives a new taste to life.[26] One wonders whether the stance of the Church, which interpreted the miracle that way was not part of inter-culturation.

3. The Lukan Praxis

It is generally held today that the two Lucan volumes brim with universalism. Luke sees the universal character of salvation, come in

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24 Cf. Perkins, "John", 944.

25 Cf. E. Drewermann, *Taten der Liebe*. Meditation über die Wunder Jesu (Freiburg: Herder, ²1995) 162.

26 E. Grün, *Jesus - Tur zum Leben*. Das Evangelium des Johannes (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 2002) 42-43.

the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is declared a light to the Nations and the glory of the people of Israel (cf. Luke 2:32). Luke wants to set his writings in the context of every Nation and culture that the Gospel encounters. This is more obvious in the second volume of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles. We will draw a few examples from Acts to point to Luke's dialogue with the surrounding cultures.[27]

We have seen above the importance of the conversion of Paul. In Acts it acquires paramount importance in that it is a thrice-told tale: in chapters 9:22 and 26. In all the three narrations of the Damascus road event the reader is told of a light from heaven flashing around Paul. Frederick E. Brenk has investigated the Hellenistic colouring of these passages in Acts and its possible meaning for a Greek reader.[28] He thinks that the Damascus Road event could be compared to lightning epiphanies in classical Greek literature, for which he brings a number of examples. In the Greek literature an epiphany can terminate difference between a god or even persecution of him and his religion, especially if the cult has only been recently introduced into a locality. The result is the transformation of disinterested or scornful disbelievers into ardent promoters of the cult, often immediately realised in the erection of a temple. Thus the epiphany constitutes the foundation myth of a sanctuary. Here we find similarities in the Damascus epiphany. It effects the beginning of Paul's transformation, not as the promoter of a local cult but into an indefatigable missionary to the entire world.[29]   After having considered the various aspects of the story in relation with Greek epiphanies Brenk concludes: "For the Greek reader, the Pauline epiphany would be almost primordial in its return to the mysterious sanctification and transformation of the *diobolētos* (the one struck by a lightning). It

27   Many New Testament interpreters use the date A. D. 80-85 for the composition of Luke-Acts, and see Acts as following the Gospel. For a discussion see J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998) 51-55.

28   F. E. Brenk, "Greek Epiphanies and Paul on the Road to Damaskos", in *The Notion of Religion in Comparative Research*. Selected Proceedings of XVI International Association for the History of Religions, Rome, September 1990 (Rome, 1994) 417-426.

29   Brenk, "Greek Epiphanies", 418.

includes all the significant factors of a lighting epiphany: sound and light, punishment and apotheosis, timely salvation of a nascent cult, the supernatural ratification of conversion resulting from submerged feeling. Finally, it belongs in a sense to the 'foundational myth' or 'story' of Christianity in a broad sense, the unmistakably divine ratification of Paul's mission to Gentiles".[30] The thesis of Brenk supports our contention that Luke did not desist from using categories and images of the Greek culture and religion to bring home to his audience the Good News that he was proclaiming.

The speeches in Acts have ever fascinated the readers for their theological depth and subtlety. Paul's speech in Areopagus of Athens (Acts 17:22- 31) before Epicurean and Stoic philosophers is a masterpiece of lucan rhetoric. After hearing it, some of Paul's listeners said that they would like to hear him again. Beginning with the unknown God, Paul comes to say that God is not far from any one of them (v. 27). Then surprisingly in verse 28 Paul quotes a Pagan poet, "For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring'". In the first part of the verse Luke makes Paul sum up human existence: in God is rooted all human existence; all human movement and all human life. Some interpreters have seen this first part of the verse modelled on the words of the sixth-century Epimenides of Knossos in Crete, which is held by some as unlikely[31]. But the second part, 'For we too are his offspring' (*tou gar kai genos semen*) the author himself notes as a quotation. The citation is from the third-century Stoic poet Aratus, who was born in Soli in Cilicia *ca*, from his work *phaenomena* 5.[32] What is quite amazing is that the words of Stoic philosopher-poet becomes part of the word of God through its use by Paul in his speech. Luke thinks it quite right that one needs to debate (Acts 17:18) with cultures and philosophies to advance the Gospel.

We shall not be far-fetched if we hold again that from a narrative perspective in Acts 28:11 there is the interaction of religion and culture. It is stated that they set sail from Malta for Rome on an Alexandrian ship with the Twin Brothers (*Dioskouroi*) as its figurehead. The *Dioskouroi* "the lads of Zeus", usually called the Heavenly Twins, were

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30   Brenk, "Greek Epiphanies", 426.

31   Cf. Fitzmyer, *Acts,* 610.   32.   Fitzmyer, *Acts,* 611.

Kastor and Polyeukes[33]. They were also the gods of truth. Paul is awaiting trail before Caesar in Rome, and that is the reason why he is taken to Rome as a prisoner. Acts, however, does not depict the trail of Paul. But the author wants to say that Paul's case would win because he is travelling by the ship of truth. It is not syncretism that Luke is practising here, it is a picture of Luke in dialogue with the cultures and religions of his time.

4. 1 Peter and 2 Peter

1 Peter, a letter written to encourage and strengthen in faith groups of Christians in Asia Minor undergoing suffering, is paraenetic in character.[34] In the middle part of the body of the letter[35] the author gives guidelines for behaviour in everyday situations of life. This instruction includes also a *Haustafel*, household code, from 2:13-3,7 and more specifically 2:18-3,7.[36] Here in 3:1-7 the topic is that of marital relations and the appropriate roles of wives and husbands. Generally this teaching is characterised by a conformity to prevailing cultural notions concerning males and females, their differing roles and status as determined by nature, and the features of proper marital relations and conduct. Accordingly the New Testament texts like 1 Pet 3:1-7; Eph 5:22-33 and Col 3:18-20 are considered as adaptations of a particular Hellenistic tradition concerning household management[37] and that Christian authors in adopting them modified and Christianised this traditon[38]. This has

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33   Fitzmyer, *Acts,* 786.

34   This letter stems from a Petrine group in Rome and the date of the letter should be sometime between A. D. 65-80, i.e., after the death of the apostle Peter. For a discussion of the authorship and date of the letter see J. Prasad, *Foundations of the Christian Way of Life According to 1 Peter 1:13-25. An Exegetico-Theological Study* (AnBib 146; Roma Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000) 7-46.

35.   See Prasad, *Foundations,* 75-117 for an analysis of the literary structure of the letter.

36   Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (Translated and augmented by J. E. Alsup from German) (Grand Rapids, MI, 1993) 162-179, would prefer the name "station codes" rather than "household codes".

37   See for example the parallels drawn by D. L. Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive: The Domestic Codes in 1 Peter* (SBLMS 26; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981) 21-62.

38   Cf. J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (AB 37B; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000) 503-511, 551-552.

been rightly considered by interpreters as acculturation or inter-culturation.[39]

The main problem that 2 Peter, the latest document of the New Testament corpus, addresses is theodicy, God's just judgment, along with the delay of Christ's parousia.[40] Interpreters have pointed to the similarity that exits between 2 Pet 3:8-9 and Plutarch's *Moralia,* "On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance" 5 -6,9. For example, in the text here Plutarch says, " ... whereas God, we must presume, distinguishes whether the passions of the sick soul to which he administers his justice will in anyway yield and make room for repentance (*metanoia*), and for those in whose nature vice is not unrelieved or intractable, he fixes a period of grace."[41] Common to both the works is the problem of the delay of the judgment of God. Both have the view that the interim period is to be used for repentance. Both think also that the deity operates on a different temporal scale.[42] Although we do not hold that 2 Pet depended on Plutarch, the same wavelengths in which both the authors speak indicate the kind of opening that 2 Pet had towards the Greco-Roman cultural and religious milieu.

Conclusion

We have been looking for the ground and for the fact of inter-culturation, as it was practised in the early Christian period. In our process we have dealt more with Paul due to his foundational character, and in the search through the other books we have been only sketchy, looking for occasional paradigmatic texts, with which the process could be evidenced. The primitive Christianity was developed in different contexts. On the one hand there was the originating Jewish ambient, on the other hand there was the Hellenistic culture, with its philosophy and

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39   Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive,* 65-116, has to an extent exaggerated this aspect in arguing that what the author of 1 Peter wanted by asking wives to be submissive was to promote Christian accommodation to outsiders' standards of morality with a concern for allaying social suspician of domestic subversion customarily directed against Eastern religions. Elliott, *1 Peter,* 584, rightly contests this thesis by holding that it is precisely holy non-conformity that is advised of the recipients of the letter, although cultural intergration is also part of it.

40   Neyrey, "The Second Letter of Peter,"

41   See the text as in M. E. Boring - K. Berger - C. Colpe, *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Abingdon, Nashville (1995) 538.

42   Cf. Boring - Berger - Colpe, *Hellenistic Commentary,* 538-539.

religion which searched for the truth concerning the human and the world. The theologian and the believer of the early Christian period, as they found in the person of Jesus of Nazareth the centre-point of the history of salvation, and as they wanted to bring forth the story of Jesus, the Good News, they had to necessarily do it in dialogue with these cultures. Therefore the dialogical structure of the book that came about is both constitutive and ontological. This structure was also one born out of definite choices, contrasts and differentiations, through which all a different identity of the book emerged. Hence in this book even as there is a strong identity affirmed, equally so there is an inherent dialogical character[43]. This fact has important implications for hermeneutics as proposed by the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 1993 document. While asserting very much the need for using the historical-critical method in exegesis, the Commission also approves of and evaluates the other methods and approaches. Speaking of the "sociological approach" the Commission recommends, "Religious texts are bound in reciprocal relationship to the societies in which they originate. This is clearly the case as regards biblical texts. Consequently, the scientific study of the Bible requires as exact a knowledge as is possible of the social conditions distinctive of the various milieus in which the tradition recorded in the Bible took shape."[44] Further, presenting the "approach through cultural anthropology" as closely related to the "sociological approach" the Commission says, " This approach allows one to distinguish more clearly those elements of the biblical message that are permanent, as having their foundation in human nature, and those which are more contingent, being due to the particular features of certain cultures."[45] This constitutes a challenge for the interpreter. The very nature of the book that it originated through a process of inter-culturation obliges the interpreter to see how it can be translated in the categories of the one approaching it from a different context and culture, that is, how it can be inculturated and actualised in the context of different and new readers.

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43   Cf. Spreafico, "La Bibbia, modello e sfida di inculturazione," 18-19.

44   The Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993) 57.

45   Biblical Commission, *Interpretation,* 61.